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**THESIS**

***REALPOLITIK AND  
IRAN'S POST-SADDAM STRATEGY FOR IRAQ***

by

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June 2004

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***REALPOLITIK AND IRAN'S STRATEGY FOR POST-SADDAM IRAQ***

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## ABSTRACT

Throughout history, threats emerging from Iran's frontiers have significantly influenced its security policies towards Iraq. Given Operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom, Iran's security environment has changed a great deal. Does Iran have a strategy for post-Saddam Iraq and, if so, what is it?

With few exceptions, Kenneth Waltz's *Realpolitik* and balance-of-power theories have guided Iran's security policy decisions. The combined effects of Iran's formative history, individual and institutional agendas, and national interests form the foundation for a *Realpolitik* strategy aimed at preventing a resurgent "anti-Teheran" government in Iraq.

Pragmatism, consensus, influence, and competition appear to be the watchwords for an assertive strategy built upon military prudence and cross-border, multi-disciplined engagement. Iran is putting its internal political and economic house in order so as to achieve greater effectiveness in the pursuit of its national interests vis-à-vis Iraq and the United States. While an alliance is unlikely, there is alignment with the U.S.-led coalition's strategic interests in Iraq.

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## **I. IRAN'S NEW SECURITY ENVIRONMENT**

Iran's security environment has changed a great deal since 11 September 2001. In a rare alignment of interests, the United States has severely crippled and eliminated two of Iran's biggest regional threats -- the Taliban and Saddam Hussein.

On Iran's eastern border, Hamid Karzai's interim Afghan government now works to build a democratic state and centralize power, while U.S., coalition and Pakistani troops search for remnants of Taliban and Al Qaeda forces.

Another of Iran's neighbors, Pakistan, has once again become a close ally of the United States. However, this time the foe is no longer the Soviet Union, but instead, terrorism. Recently, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and the United States implicated Iran as a major client in Pakistan's nuclear proliferation scandal.

Shifting to Iran's western border, the quick and decisive victory in Iraq has become clouded by the combination of a growing insurgency, foreign terrorism, and few victories in the information operations fight. This hampers coalition state-building efforts in Iraq and, to many, Iraq's future appears increasingly uncertain.

### **A. DOES IRAN HAVE A STRATEGY FOR POST-SADDAM IRAQ AND, IF SO, WHAT IS IT?**

Given Iran's new security environment, it faces new policy decisions on how best to deal with these changes. In the past, Iran has used its influence in Iraq to try to

protect its interests and vice versa.<sup>1</sup> Accusations have been made by some in the United States and Great Britain that Iran is doing the same today.<sup>2</sup> Regardless of whether these accusations are true or not, one question demands further exploration: Does Iran have a strategy for post-Saddam Iraq and, if so, what is it?

It appears that the combined effects of several independent variables are at the heart of an Iranian *Realpolitik* strategy that seeks to prevent a resurgent "anti-Teheran" Iraq. Three key questions will shed further light on this claim: 1) What historical events have significantly influenced Iranian security policy towards Iraq?; 2) What are the agendas of the actors and institutions that determine Iranian security policy towards Iraq?; and, finally, 3) What are Iran's national interests in Iraq? The goal of this thesis is to reveal Iran's strategy by exploring the interaction between these three independent variables.

## **B. CONVENTIONAL WISDOM, REALPOLITIK, AND BALANCE-OF-POWER THEORY**

Conventional wisdom holds two different viewpoints regarding Iran's strategic outlook on regional

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<sup>1</sup> Iran and Iraq's meddling in each other's affairs goes back generations. For testimony about Iran inciting student unrest in Iraq see Ambassador Berry, "Incoming Telegram," ed. Declassified Documents Reference System (DDRS) (Baghdad: U.S. State Department, 1952).

<sup>2</sup> Dilip Hiro, *Analysis: Iran's influence in Iraq* [Internet] (BBC, 15 April 2004 [cited 26 April 2004]); available from [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle\\_east/3629765.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/3629765.stm), Ewen MacAskill, "Iraq after the War: Blair envoy warns Iran on meddling: In an interview, Sir Jeremy Greenstock reveals his fears about the threat posted by malign Shias and the battle to win hearts and minds," *The Guardian*, 23 October 2003, 4.



policymaking. The first viewpoint, held by many American policymakers, asserts that Iranian policymaking is still governed by religious fervor and ideology that originated from Iran's 1979 revolution. Adam Tarock and RAND researchers argue the opposite - Iranian security policy, particularly near its borders, has become increasingly pragmatic and governed by "...cold national interests" over religious imperatives.<sup>3</sup>

Tarock's and RAND's conclusions reflect the thinking of some of *Realpolitik's* more famous proponents, from Niccolo Machiavelli to Henry Kissinger. According to Kenneth Waltz, *Realpolitik* has several elements:

...the state's interest provides the spring of action; the necessities of policy arise from the unregulated competition of states; calculation based on these necessities can discover the policies that will best serve a state's interest; success is the ultimate test of policy, and success is defined as preserving and strengthening the state.<sup>4</sup>

To help explain *Realpolitik's* results, Waltz developed his famous balance-of-power theory. Several assumptions about states underpin Waltz's theory:

They are unitary actors who, at a minimum, seek their own preservation and, at a maximum, strive for universal domination. States, or those who act for them, try in more or less sensible ways to use the means available in order to achieve the ends in view. Those means fall into two

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<sup>3</sup> Adam Tarock, *Iran's Foreign Policy Since 1990: Pragmatism Supercedes Islamic Ideology* (Commack: Nova Science, 1999), 38. and Daniel Byman et al., *Iran's Security Policy in the Post-Revolutionary Era* (Santa Monica: RAND, 2001), 2.

<sup>4</sup> Robert O. Keohane, ed., *Neorealism and its critics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 115-116.

categories: internal efforts (moves to increase economic capability, to increase military strength, to develop clever strategies) and external efforts (moves to strengthen and enlarge one's own alliance or to weaken and shrink an opposing one). The external game of alignment and realignment requires...two...or more players... To the assumptions of the theory we then add the condition for its operation: that two or more states coexist in a self-help system, one with no superior agent to come to the aid of states that may be weakening or to deny to any of them the use of whatever instruments they think will serve their purposes. The theory, then, is built up from the assumed motivations of states and the actions that correspond to them. It describes the constraints that arise from the system that those actions produce, and it indicates the expected outcome: namely, the formation of balances of power.<sup>5</sup>

To sum up Waltz, if a state perceives a threat, it will balance against the threat, and it is through this theoretical framework that Iran's post-Saddam strategy for Iraq will be explored.

### **C. KEY OBSERVATIONS**

1. With few exceptions, history has revealed that a long-term pattern of *Realpolitik* pragmatism has dominated Iranian security policy throughout much of the 19th and 20th Centuries.

2. Past experiences have conditioned present-day Iran to militarily and diplomatically counter regional threats.

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 117.

3. Due to the greater emphasis placed on informal personal networks over formal institutional power, the critical difference between Iran's domestic politics and its chief national security assessment body, the Supreme Council for National Security (SCNS), is the council's ability to achieve a consensus that satisfies Iran's *Realpolitik* interests.

4. Recognizing the link between realist Kenneth Waltz's domestic and foreign balance of power politics, Iran is attempting to put its internal political and economic house in order so as to achieve greater effectiveness in the pursuit of its national interests vis-à-vis Iraq and the United States.

5. While part of the SCNS' agenda appears to be sympathetic towards Iraq's occupation resistance and hopeful for its self-determined future, in accordance with Iran's national interests, it stops short of advocating Iranian adventurism in Iraq.

6. The common denominator for Iran's strong religiopolitical interests in Iraq is continued influence with Iraq's Shi'i clergy.

7. Iran's efforts to put its domestic economic house in order by attracting foreign investment, and promoting the participation of Iranian industry in Iraq's reconstruction, will all serve to counter the Iraq competition that Iran fears.

#### **D. TOPIC CONTROVERSY AND IMPORTANCE**

Given the major political, economic, and military investments in Iraq and the stated goals of the Bush administration's National Security Strategy, the success or failure of Iraq's transformation is of great concern to the United States, and the international community -- including those states who opposed the invasion. According to the Bush administration, the theoretical and controversial long-term reward for successful state-building in Iraq will be a regional democratic "ripple effect", resulting in greater security for the United States, Europe, and the Middle East.<sup>6</sup> It is important to know if Iran's *Realpolitik* strategy for Iraq is aligned with, or counter to, the strategy of the United States and its coalition partners.

The first step towards revealing Iran's strategy is to examine its past history with Iraq. Chapter II will explore three significant historical periods for Iran: 1) the Cold War and subsequent collapse of the Soviet Union; 2) Iran's revolution and the 1980-88 Iran-Iraq war; and, 3) the 1991 Persian Gulf War. The goal here is to identify any long-term historical patterns that may be at work in Iranian strategic thinking towards Iraq today.

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<sup>6</sup> One of the stated methods for achieving the goals of the National Security Strategy is to "expand the circle of development by opening societies and building the infrastructure of democracy." See President George W. Bush, *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America* [Internet] (The White House, 17 September 2002 [cited 19 May 2004]); available from <http://www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss.html>.

## **II. HISTORY'S IMPACT ON IRANIAN SECURITY POLICY**

*When was the last time Iran invaded another country?* A question like this is much more relevant to Middle Eastern countries like Syria, Iraq, Egypt, Turkey, or Pakistan - but not to Iran. For Iran, one must ask the opposite. Iran's geo-strategic position has put it in the cross-hairs of numerous invading armies, including the Arabs who brought Islam during the 600s, the subsequent Mongol holocaust, and the World War II Allied occupation, all the way up to Iraq's 1980 invasion. Threats emerging from Iran's frontiers have significantly influenced its pragmatic security policies towards its neighbors, and specifically, Iraq (see Figure 1 regional reference map). Three key periods have revealed a long-term pattern of *Realpolitik* security policy towards Iraq -- the Cold War and collapse of the Soviet Union, Iran's revolution and subsequent 1980-88 Gulf War, and the second 1991 Gulf War.

### **A. THE COLD WAR AND SUBSEQUENT SOVIET COLLAPSE**

Iran's tradition of security policy pragmatism goes back to the 19<sup>th</sup> Century Qajar dynasty. During this time, Great Britain, Russia, and, briefly, France, carried on a geopolitical contest known as The Great Game in which India, Afghanistan, and Iran served as their arena. However, exploitation was not one-sided in this contest: the Qajars deftly played the great power rivalries off of each other in order to preserve their own regime and Iran's security.

Iran was again center-stage during the opening shots of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century's "Great Game," but this time it was called The Cold War. After World War II, allies became adversaries and, in 1946, the Soviet Union tested Western resolve by not withdrawing its troops from Azerbaijan and Iran. The combined effects of President Truman's initial hard-line response, George Kennan's famous 1946 "Long Telegram" and 1947 "X" article, and the Korean War, resulted in a long-lasting Western policy of Soviet containment outlined in the United States' NSC-68 national security document.

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, Pan-Arab Nationalism swept most of the Middle East.<sup>7</sup> Reminiscent of Iran's earlier Qajars, Egypt lead several states in playing the United States and Soviet Union against each other through its policies of non-alignment. In 1955, the United States sponsored a Soviet containment security alliance called the Baghdad Pact, which Egypt and several other Arab nations rejected. Iraq initially supported this alliance, but, after the first of several coups and counter-coups, withdrew under pressure from its communist party. However, this was not the case for Iran. Under Muhammad Reza Shah, Iran perceived the Soviet Union as a bigger threat and balanced against it via the Baghdad Pact. Muhammad Reza Shah also viewed his alliance with the United States as a

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<sup>7</sup> With the exclusion of non-Arab Middle Eastern states like Iran, racism was built in to Pan-Arab Nationalism. Egypt's Nasser even compared Iran to early Israeli Zionists and accused it of trying to undermine the Arab character of the Gulf states via Iranian emigration. See Shireen T. Hunter, ed., *Outlook for Iranian-Gulf Relations, Iran, Iraq, and the Arab Gulf States* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 432.

major tool to further his domestic modernization goals and aspirations for regional hegemony.

While Iraq slid under the Soviet sphere of influence, Iran became one of the United States' twin pillars<sup>8</sup> against Soviet expansion in the Middle East. These outside alliances, combined with historical built-in rivalries, drove bigger wedges between Iran-Iraq relations during this period. Long denied equal access to the Shatt al-Arab waterway<sup>9</sup> that straddles Iran and Iraq, Muhammad Reza Shah exploited Iraq's Kurd problem by supporting the Kurds with sophisticated weapons and ammunition against the Ba'athist regime. In a classic example of *Realpolitik* statesmanship, Iran was subsequently granted Shatt al-Arab equal access in exchange for abandoning its Iraqi Kurd support at the 1975 Algiers Accords.

The Cold War ended with the 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union. Iran, now under clerical leadership, had adopted a "neither East nor West" foreign policy and viewed the Soviet Union's demise with ambivalence. The Soviet collapse and the newly independent Central Asian border states meant that a superpower threat no longer existed on

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<sup>8</sup> The other half of the twin pillars being Saudi Arabia.

<sup>9</sup> In a report by President John S.D. Eisenhower, "Synopsis of State and Intelligence material reported to the President," ed. Declassified Documents Reference System (DDRS) (Washington D.C.: White House, 1960)., the lingering Shatt al-Arab tension between Iran and Iraq came under American presidential scrutiny as early as 1960. The Shatt al-Arab dispute dates back to the creation of Iraq under the British mandate following World War I. Instead of following international custom by dividing the waterway at its greatest depth, Great Britain simply gave all of it to the new state of Iraq.

Iran's northern frontier. However, relations between Iran and the United States had further declined, and Iran felt even more vulnerable in this new unipolar world.<sup>10</sup>

#### **B. IRAN'S REVOLUTION AND THE FIRST GULF WAR (1980-1988)**

In contrast to the Cold War, Iran's next formative security policy event would be a hot war with neighboring Iraq and a disastrous departure from *Realpolitik* strategic thinking. The 1979 Iranian revolution inspired Muslims around the world and struck a blow against the allegedly corrupt, illegitimate Arab regimes in power and their foreign supporters. Revolutionary Iran solidified its role as the leader of all Shi'is through the efforts of Ayat Allah Khomeini. He convincingly argued that the position of Shi'a Islam's supreme guide (the interpreter of God's word) should only be held by the wisest and morally upright cleric - meaning him.<sup>11</sup> Though not focused on territorial ambitions, Iran's popular revolution inspired its new leadership to pursue a variety of Islamic foreign policy objectives that put Iran's regional neighbors ill at ease.<sup>12</sup>

Iraq and Iran did not receive each other well in part due to poor past experiences between leaders as well as built-in historical rivalries. Anoushiravan Ehteshami made the following observation of Iran-Iraq relations:

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<sup>10</sup> Tarock, *Iran's Foreign Policy Since 1990: Pragmatism Supercedes Islamic Ideology*, 62.

<sup>11</sup> Hala Jaber, *Hezbollah: Born With A Vengeance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 69.

<sup>12</sup> Byman et al., *Iran's Security Policy in the Post-Revolutionary Era*, 8.



The new revolutionary leadership in Tehran inherently challenged the new Iraqi president, Saddam Hussein, who had only taken control of the Iraqi regime months before in July 1979. Iraq was also forced to trade the known quantity of the shah for the unpredictability of Ayat Allah Ruhollah Khomeini. Ironically, Iranian fears of Iraqi hostility against the Islamic regime, informed by Khomeini's assessment of the Iraqi regime that had acted as his host in the holy city of Najaf from 1965 to 1978, mirrored Iraqi mistrust of Iran. Through an accident of history, personal mistrust inflamed political tensions, as Khomeini had experienced firsthand the systematic suppression of the Shi'a clerical establishment and its flock by the Ba'ath leadership in the 1960s and 1970s. In Khomeini's eyes, Saddam himself had been implicated in the regime's anti-Shi'a campaign even before rising to the pinnacle of power in Iraq.<sup>13</sup>

Personal conflicts, combined with historical built-in rivalries, set Iraq on a path towards war. Iran and Iraq both had strong desires to become the Persian Gulf's regional hegemon and Saddam Hussein sensed that the Khomeini regime was militarily weak after having purged the Shah's army. Hussein further justified his invasion with irredentist claims to the post-World War I British-mandate loss of Khuzistan/Arabistan<sup>14</sup> to Iran and also, once again, the Shatt al-Arab waterway.

In 1980, Iraq invaded Iran with the expectation that the Iranian Arabs of Khuzistan/Arabistan would recognize Iraq as their liberators. This did not occur, but the rapid mobilization of Iran's population for the war did. Iran pitted its population and ideological strength against

<sup>13</sup> Anoushiravan Ehteshami, "Iran-Iraq Relations after Saddam," *The Washington Quarterly* 26, no. 4 (2003): 116.

<sup>14</sup> Hunter, ed., *Outlook for Iranian-Gulf Relations*, 437.

Iraq's technological advantage and the support of several outside powers including Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the United States, and even the Soviet Union.

Iraq was incredulous at the Iranian resistance and, in 1982, the war began to favor Iran. The Iraqi army retreated and Saddam Hussein made an offer for peace that was rejected by Khomeini. Idealism again trumped *Realpolitik*, and, according to Monte Palmer, "...export of the Revolution had taken precedence over internal development."<sup>15</sup> Instead, Iran attacked into Southern Iraq and attempted to pull off a feat similar to Iraq's Khuzistan/Arabistan strategy by laying siege to Basra. Once again, though, loyalty to the state prevailed and the Iraqi Shi'is of Basra failed to rise up against Saddam.

Wide-spread foreign support tipped the balance back in Iraq's favor and the war settled into a stalemate. Even with Iranian domestic pressures mounting over a war-time 35 percent inflation rate and the human cost of Iran's human wave tactics,<sup>16</sup> Iran still conveyed a narrow idealistic strategy through which the only option was "...to pursue the war [with Iraq] until victory."<sup>17</sup>

Eventually, with Iran on the verge of collapse, Khomeini was forced to drink from the "poisoned chalice" and end the war with Iraq. No clear victor could be

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<sup>15</sup> Monte Palmer, *The Politics of the Middle East* (Itasca: F.E. Peacock, 2002), 352.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 353.

<sup>17</sup> This was conveyed to U.S. Ambassador Petrone by a Polyakov-led Soviet delegation. See Ambassador Joseph C. Petrone, "U.S. - Soviet Regional Expert Exchanges on the Iran-Iraq War," ed. Declassified Documents Reference System (DDRS) (Geneva: U.S. State Department, 1987), 3.

declared, but Iraq still occupied over 2,600 square miles of Iranian territory, held 100,000 Iranian prisoners, the Shatt al-Arab dispute remained unresolved,<sup>18</sup> and neither Iraq nor Iran had clearly become the new regional hegemon that they both aspired to. Additionally, for Iran:

The war, coupled with the fact that the rest of the world supported the aggressor and not the aggrieved, left a deep psychological scar on the Iranian psyche and that, in turn, impacted on the country's foreign policy.<sup>19</sup>

However, the scarring of the Iranian psyche was one of the positive outcomes of the war because Iran's "...sense of realism and moderation... [returned to its] foreign policy establishment."<sup>20</sup> This once again worked in Iran's favor during Iraq's next bid for regional hegemony.

### **C. THE SECOND GULF WAR (1990-1991)**

Iran and Iraq re-established diplomatic relations in 1990, but it was shortly thereafter that Iraq instigated another regional crisis. The Bush administration, distracted by the crumbling Soviet Union, was caught by surprise when Iraq invaded Kuwait. Saddam realized that he was faced with a war that he could not win, so he sought regional allies like Jordan and Iran. In an effort to court Iranian support, Iraq reconciled its unsettled 1980-88 Gulf War issues by returning all Iranian prisoners of war and annexed territory.<sup>21</sup> *Realpolitik* trumped Idealism's

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<sup>18</sup> Palmer, *The Politics of the Middle East*, 357.

<sup>19</sup> Tarock, *Iran's Foreign Policy Since 1990: Pragmatism Supercedes Islamic Ideology*, 4.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Palmer, *The Politics of the Middle East*, 358.

inclination for aiding a neighboring Muslim state's fight against the West. Iran accepted Iraq's offer by declaring its neutrality, enforcing U.N. Security Council sanctions against Iraq, and by not returning Iraqi aircraft that had been evacuated to Iran just before the war.

Iraq's stubborn challenge to the United States was a windfall for Iran. Iraq's defeat and subsequent containment at the hands of a U.S.-led coalition eliminated a potentially resurgent threat to Iran. During this period, Iran was able to focus inward on its own reconstruction and recovery from the first Gulf War, as well as improve relations with several of its Persian Gulf neighbors.

One outcome that Iran did not welcome, though, was the lingering presence of U.S. military forces in the Persian Gulf. Iran viewed itself as the new guardian of the Gulf and, in a classic application of Kenneth Waltz's balance of power theory, it proposed a new regional security agreement with neighboring Arab states in order to balance against the Persian Gulf's new hegemon - the United States. Iran's initiative was rejected by its neighbors, though, in favor of a security agreement with the United States.<sup>22</sup> This experience, combined with memories of Iraqi missiles landing on Iranian cities, encouraged Iran to pursue a solo defense strategy and ballistic missile capability of its own.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Tarock, *Iran's Foreign Policy Since 1990: Pragmatism Supercedes Islamic Ideology*, 4.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 5.

**D. CONCLUSIONS--WHAT HISTORICAL EVENTS HAVE SIGNIFICANTLY INFLUENCED IRANIAN SECURITY POLICY TOWARDS IRAQ?**

Whether an ally or unaligned, and regardless of the Iranian regime in power, history has revealed a long-term pattern of *Realpolitik* pragmatism that has dominated Iranian security policy through much of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries. Past experiences have conditioned present-day Iran to militarily and diplomatically counter regional threats. Iran's geostrategic location and Great Powers vulnerability made *Realpolitik* security policies a matter of state survival, especially when confronted with powerful states like the Soviet Union, Great Britain, Iraq, and the United States.

Iran's only departure from *Realpolitik* was its post-revolution Idealism experiment that cost it a generation of young men<sup>24</sup> and isolated it from most of the world.<sup>25</sup> This experience, combined with Iran's sensitivity to foreign interference, motivated Iran to pursue a self-sufficient defense strategy. Analysis of the Cold War, and First and Second Gulf Wars reveals a long-term pattern of past Iranian *Realpolitik* decisionmaking that influences Iran's security policy towards Iraq today.

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<sup>24</sup> The implication here is not that Iran started the 1980-88 war - it did not. However, after almost two year of fighting, Hussein's army was forced to withdraw almost completely from Iran. His subsequent offers for peace were rejected by Khomeini in favor of destroying Hussein's regime. Khomeini's army was unable to accomplish this and his decision prolonged the war another six years, resulting in a total of 350,000 - 400,000 Iranian deaths. See Wilfried Buchta, *Who Rules Iran? The Structure of Power in the Islamic Republic* (Washington, D.C.: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2000), 215.

<sup>25</sup> However, in a Machiavellian way, even Iran's war with Iraq had some *Realpolitik* elements to it. For example, the commitment of Iran's armed forces to the Iraqi front allowed Ayat Allah Khomeini to consolidate his fledgling political power base without a domestic military threat.

While the past sheds light on Iran's strategy for post-Saddam Iraq, this question can only be partially answered until Iran's security policy leaders and institutions are also examined. Chapter III will explore these leaders and institutions with the goal of gaining an appreciation for their alternately competing and complementary security policy agendas.



Figure 1. Middle East Regional Map (From Ref. [http://www.cdi.org/terrorism/iraq\\_map.cfm](http://www.cdi.org/terrorism/iraq_map.cfm) (Accessed on 13 June 2004))

### **III. THE IRANIAN TEAM: AGENDA OF CONSENSUS OR COMPETITION?**

The popular press' depiction of Iranian politics and decisionmaking has been over-simplified as solely a contest between so-called reformers and religious hardliners. The political reality for Iran is much more complex, and, with no strong-man to deal with, like Egypt's Mubarak or Pakistan's Musharaff, it is a source of frustration for states seeking to engage Iranian decisionmakers. Indeed, this observation by Saudi Arabia's Prince Bandar is revealing:

The Iranian government has told us that they are not supporting (al Qaeda) and not cooperating with them.... But those people are there (in Iran), and somebody must be helping them. The question is who?...And this is the problem with Iran. The people who we can deal with can't deliver, they can't lead eight ducks across the street... And the guys who can deliver, they're not interested. So it's a waiting game.<sup>26</sup>

#### **A. FACTIONALISM AND THE COMPLEXITY OF IRANIAN POLITICS**

Juan Cole agrees with Prince Bandar's assessment, in that Iran is not a monolithic political state, but it is a theocracy that is guaranteed by a constitution.<sup>27</sup> After Supreme Leader Khomeini's 1989 death, Iran's political

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<sup>26</sup> Robert Collier, "Iran lagging in war on terror, says Saudi envoy to U.S.; Diplomat accuses hard-liners of refusing to extradite captured al Qaeda members," *The San Francisco Chronicle*, 20 September 2003, A10. Since this article was originally published, Iran has extradited some Al Qaeda suspects back to their countries of origin, like Saudi Arabia and Kuwait.

<sup>27</sup> Juan Cole, *Sacred Space and Holy War: The Politics, Culture, and History of Shi'ite Islam* (New York: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd, 2002), 189.

system became much more multi-polar with many competing factions vying for influence and power, though each also maintained distinct interests and a unique constituency. Iraq and the United States are two of the most contentious issues that are built in to Iran's domestic rivalries and power struggles. This seemingly chaotic system makes decisionmaking in a "...complex and modern system of stratified layers between the top elites and the masses"<sup>28</sup> a long-term process, subject to many checks and balances.

Three categories depict Iran's main political factions -- the *Islamic left*, the *traditionalist right*, and the *modernist right*.<sup>29</sup> Change is constant in politics and Iranian politics is no less dynamic. What is important to realize is that some individual elites may subscribe to political attributes that span one or more of these categories and that factional loyalties change in accordance with the demands of power politics. For example, former President Rafsanjani has changed his political views several times in order to maintain political power.<sup>30</sup>

The *Islamic left* has evolved from their 1980's support of strict austerity, a state-controlled economy, and export of the revolution to a reconsideration of Supreme Leader Khomeini's political-religious teachings and a backing away from hardline views on social and cultural issues. Their

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<sup>28</sup> Mahmood Sariolghalam, "Understanding Iran: Getting Past Stereotypes and Mythology," *The Washington Quarterly* 26, no. 4 (2003): 69.

<sup>29</sup> Buchta, *Who Rules Iran? The Structure of Power in the Islamic Republic*, 11.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.



most prominent and liberal representative is the reform-minded President Khatami.<sup>31</sup>

In principle, the *traditionalist right* advocates "...private property ownership and private enterprise." Reality differs, though, with them actually favoring a socio-economic contract that perpetuates the poor's dependence on the clerical elite.<sup>32</sup> They embrace Iran's theocracy and seek to prevent the encroachment of Western cultural influences. Supreme Leader Khomeini is the most prominent representative of the *traditionalist right*.

The *modernist right*, "...also known as the technocrats, are far more 'liberal' on social or cultural issues in comparison with the traditionalist right."<sup>33</sup> Like the shah's vision for Iran from years past, "the primary goal of the modernist right is to transform Iran into a modern state," but they still strongly embrace Iran's Islamic foundation.<sup>34</sup> They believe in the "...economic development and industrialization of Iran..." as well as "...Iranian national interests tak[ing] precedence over all other concerns..."<sup>35</sup> Former President Rafsanjani's two consecutive terms in office from 1989 to 1997 best exemplify the *modernist right*. However, since leaving that office, he has defected to the *traditionalist right*.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 11.

Iran's national security and foreign policy decisions are not strangers to factional domestic political battles. When it comes to Iran's national security and foreign policy, the United States and Israel are hot topics, but the potential for a resurgent post-Saddam Iraq is now a major Iranian concern. It is here that the focus of this chapter will be narrowed to address "What are the agendas of the actors and institutions that determine Iranian security policy towards Iraq?"

## **B. FORMULATING IRANIAN SECURITY POLICY**

The security policy decisionmaking process is just a small segment of the overall Iranian political process. It is as complex, but it differs, though, in that the many actors and institutions involved generally come to an either overt, or at least tacit, consensus<sup>37</sup> that satisfies Iran's *Realpolitik* interests. This process

...requires compromise in order to avoid paralysis. With so many input points into decisionmaking, and so many overlapping or parallel institutions, cooperation is necessary to accomplish even the most basic functions of government."<sup>38</sup>

RAND has identified both formal and informal structures that are part of the overall security policy decisionmaking process. The informal structure, which is composed of largely personal networks, is "...almost always stronger than institutional power."<sup>39</sup> The key actors and

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<sup>37</sup> Byman et al., *Iran's Security Policy in the Post-Revolutionary Era*, 22.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 25.

institutions discussed below use one or both structures in order to determine Iran's security policy towards Iraq.

### **C. SECURITY POLICY ACTORS, INSTITUTIONS, AND AGENDAS**

#### **1. Supreme Council for National Security (SCNS)**

The Supreme Council for National Security is the key formal structure in which national defense and security assessment decisions are made and it plays a critical role in formulating security policy towards Iraq. Officially it is charged with "...watch[ing] over the Islamic Revolution and safeguard[ing] the IRI's [Islamic Republic of Iran] national interests as well as its sovereignty and territorial integrity."<sup>40</sup>

Article 177 of Iran's Constitution implies a foreign and domestic dualism in the SCNS's responsibilities that includes:

1. ...Determin[ing] the national defense/security policies within the framework of general policies laid down by the Leader.
2. ...Coordinat[ing] political, intelligence, social, cultural and economic activities in relation to general defense/security policies.
3. ...Exploit[ing] material and non-material resources of the country for facing internal and external threats.<sup>41</sup>

The SCNS membership is broken down amongst the heads of the executive, legislative, and judicial branches; the

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<sup>40</sup> *The Supreme National Security Council* [Internet] (NetIran, August 1997 [cited 1 June 2004]); available from <http://netiran.com/statestructure.html> and <http://www.netiran.com/profile.html>.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid. ([cited]).

Chief of the Supreme Command Council of the Armed Forces; the head of the Planning and Budget Organization (PBO); two representatives of the Supreme Leader; the Ministers of Defense, Foreign Affairs, Interior, Intelligence and Security, and the minister concerned with the topic for discussion; as well as the highest authorities of the Army and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC).<sup>42</sup>

All three of Iran's main political factions -- the *Islamic left*, the *traditionalist right*, and the *modernist right* -- are present on the SCNS. SCNS members discuss all policy recommendations, with the exception of alleged WMD and nuclear program secrets. Shahram Chubin states that a core elite, probably consisting of Supreme Leader Khomeini, the Expediency Council Chairman Rafsanjani, former IRGC Commander Mohsen Reza'i, Minister of Defense VADM Ali Shamkani, Ali Shahbazi, and possibly Supreme Leader representative Ali Rowhani, very likely serves as the long-term continuity for Iran's most sensitive national security programs.<sup>43</sup>

The 1998 Taliban crisis is a good case study for observing *Realpolitik* pragmatism, competing agendas, and consensus building at work in Iran's formal and informal security policy structure. When Iranian diplomats were executed by the Taliban at Mazar-i Sharif, many in Iran called for all out war, or at least a punitive expedition into Afghanistan. The SCNS, chaired by President Khatami,

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<sup>42</sup> Shahram Chubin, *Whither Iran? Reform, Domestic Politics and National Security* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 38, *The Supreme National Security Council* ([cited]).

<sup>43</sup> Chubin, *Whither Iran? Reform, Domestic Politics and National Security*, 38, *The Supreme National Security Council* ([cited]).

met and assessed Iran's various response options.<sup>44</sup> After heated debate, it ultimately recommended a show of force along the Afghan-Iran border via a mobilization of some 200,000 Iranian troops and the continuation of its Northern Alliance proxy war against the Taliban, but no attack into Afghanistan. Supreme Leader Khomeini concurred that war with the Taliban was not in Iran's best interests and the council's recommendations were carried out by the Iranian military.<sup>45</sup>

## **2. Supreme Leader Khomeini**

"Iran's government is based on the concept, developed by the late Ayat Allah Ruhollah Khomeini, of velayat-e faqih (guardianship of the jurisconsult), where the supreme leader (faqih) has absolute veto power, serves for life, and ostensibly derives his authority from Allah (God)."<sup>46</sup> These powers are secured by various articles in the Iranian constitution<sup>47</sup> and give Iran's Supreme Leader enormous control over Islamic law, administration, and "moral" authority. He, clearly, is Iran's most important official and serves as the commander-in-chief of the IRGC and Artesh (Regular Army). In this capacity, he has the

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<sup>44</sup> Byman et al., *Iran's Security Policy in the Post-Revolutionary Era*, 24.

<sup>45</sup> Buchta, *Who Rules Iran? The Structure of Power in the Islamic Republic*, 147-148.

<sup>46</sup> Victor L. Russillo, "Reassessing U.S. Policy Toward Iran," (Carlisle Barracks: U.S. Army War College, 2003), 6.

<sup>47</sup> *The Constitution of The Islamic Republic of Iran* [Internet] (NetIran, 28 July 1989 [cited 2 June 2004]); available from <http://www.netiran.com/laws.html>.

constitutional authority to declare war and also call for a general troop mobilization.<sup>48</sup>

Ayat Allah Khomeini succeeded Ayat Allah Khomeini following the latter's death in 1989. The constitution had to be amended at that time because he was a less senior cleric than what was mandated by law. Weaker religious credentials and Khomeini's legacy have overshadowed him for many years and his legitimacy has come under increased scrutiny, both by his peers as well as the general population. The most recent blow to his legitimacy took place during the February 2004 parliamentary elections in which he abstained from intervening on behalf of the *Islamic left* and *modernist right* candidates who had been banned from running for election by the Council of Guardians.

Supreme Leader Khomeini is the most prominent representative of the *traditionalist right*. He has long been an outspoken critic of the Great Satan (United States) in general and, specifically, the invasion and subsequent occupation of Iraq. He asserts that the invasion was all about gaining control of Persian Gulf oil resources and not about democracy and human rights.<sup>49</sup> He described coalition military operations in Iraq as iron fisted and stated: "What the Americans are doing is blameworthy, reprehensible and repulsive by any human principles and norms." He predicted: "Sooner or later, the Americans will leave Iraq

<sup>48</sup> Byman et al., *Iran's Security Policy in the Post-Revolutionary Era*, 24.

<sup>49</sup> *Iranian Media Roundup 27 April - 3 May 04* [Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS) in English] (Caversham BBC Monitoring, 4 May 2004 [cited 2 June 2004]); available from <https://portal.rccb.osis.gov/index.jsp>.

in wretchedness and humiliation.”<sup>50</sup> Given the U.S.-led invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq and President Bush’s declaration of Iran as part of the Axis of Evil, Khomeini is convinced that the United States seeks regime change for Iran as well. While he sees his power threatened by the United States, he also perceives it as bogged down in Iraq and this is his first line of defense.

### **3. Majlis Speaker Dr. Gholam-Ali Haddad-Adel and President Khatami**

The Iranian reform movement, led by President Khatami was dealt a serious blow by the *traditionalist right* during Iran’s February 2004 *majlis* (parliament) elections. Up until that time, President Khatami, enjoyed the support of a majority coalition comprised of both the *Islamic left* and *modernist right*. However, this significant change in *majlis* composition does not necessarily indicate regression back to the ideological decisionmaking that characterized the Khomeini years. Instead, it may reflect an effort to reduce friction and eliminate legislative gridlock that has characterized Iranian law-making for years. Supreme Leader Khomeini recently “...stressed that mutual cooperation between the legislative and the executive branches can pave the way for [Iran’s] progress and development...”<sup>51</sup> His optimism about improved executive and legislative cooperation is also in alignment with Iran’s public desires

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<sup>50</sup> *Iranian Media Roundup 12-19 Apr 04* [Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS) in English] (Caversham BBC Monitoring, 19 April 2004 [cited 2 June 2004]); available from <https://portal.rccb.osis.gov/index.jsp>.

<sup>51</sup> *Iranian Media Roundup 26 May - 1 Jun 04* [Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS) in English] (Caversham BBC Monitoring, 1 June 2004 [cited 2 June 2004]); available from <https://portal.rccb.osis.gov/index.jsp>.

for economic reforms modeled after China. Iran's new unity of effort to put its political and economic house in order recognizes the strong link between domestic and foreign balance of power politics. This more singular Iranian voice will be able to address both domestic and foreign policy issues much more effectively.

The speaker for the *majlis* also serves on the Supreme Council for National Security (SCNS). Dr. Gholam-Ali Haddad-Adel is the newly elected *majlis* speaker and he is also the first non-cleric to serve as parliamentary speaker since the Iranian revolution 25 years ago. He represents the *traditionalist right*, but his election to the influential position of speaker signifies that real political power is no longer exclusive to the clergy.<sup>52</sup> Dr. Haddad-Adel's daughter is married to Supreme Leader Khomeini's son,<sup>53</sup> so it came as no surprise that Adel's first speech before the *majlis* closely mirrored Khomeini's encouragement above for better cooperation within the government. Dr. Haddad-Adel stated: "The top priority of the Seventh Majles' work is to cut useless, futile and controversial arguments and strengthen the atmosphere of working for solving the people's problems."<sup>54</sup>

Dr. Haddad-Adel continued with his views on Iraq: "In the first Majles session, we condemn America's presence in

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<sup>52</sup> Sadeq Saba, *Iran to get non-cleric as speaker* [Internet] (BBC, 24 May 2004 [cited 3 June 2004]); available from [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle\\_east/3743755.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/3743755.stm).

<sup>53</sup> Ibid. ([cited]).

<sup>54</sup> *Highlights: Iran Press Reports 29 May Majles Session* [Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS) translation from Persian] (Sharq & Resalat, 30 May 2004 [cited 3 June 2004]); available from <https://portal.rccb.osis.gov/index.jsp>.



the region and the occupation of Iraq... Muslim people of Iran will not forgive the Americans for occupation of the Iraqi soil and desecration of holy sites."<sup>55</sup> After his speech, Dr. Haddad-Adel was asked by a journalist if there was ever a precedent for *majlis* representatives to start their work with the slogan of "Death to America." Dr. Haddad-Adel replied: "Do you know of a precedent when holy sites were occupied and being desecrated by American forces concurrent with the opening of a parliament in Iran?"<sup>56</sup> His statements indicate that many Iranians empathize with the people of Iraq and that the American-led occupation has crossed a red line with the fighting that has taken place in some of the holiest cities of Shi'a Islam. With Saddam Hussein removed, Iranian malice from the Iran-Iraq war does not seem to trump greater Shi'ism in this particular case.

While Dr. Haddad-Adel will focus on cooperation and legislative affairs, the "secular" side of the executive branch, under the stewardship of President Khatami and his cabinet, is responsible for the daily affairs of the state. Though President Khatami serves as the influential SCNS chairman, his constitutional and political authority is limited and he has no authority over the Iranian military. The council's decisions are only enforceable after the supreme leader's approval.<sup>57</sup> In order to avoid government paralysis, President Khatami generally cooperates with the supreme leader.

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid. ([cited]).

<sup>56</sup> Ibid. ([cited]).

<sup>57</sup> *The Supreme National Security Council* ([cited]).

President Khatami is considered to be a very liberal representative of the *Islamic left*. His presidential powers are significantly weaker than his foreign presidential counterparts, and are subservient to Supreme Leader Khomeini. His public views on Iraq are that the American-led attack and subsequent occupation have served their purpose, and it is now time for the coalition to withdraw.<sup>58</sup> He has repeatedly expressed his support for Grand Ayat Allah Sistani's plan for Iraq and feels that the key to Iraq's recovery is "...holding a free election in the country. This, Khatami said, is the 'same thing that the grand source of emulation Grand Ayat Allah Sistani has stressed.'" <sup>59</sup> On a separate occasion, he stated to an Iraqi Governing Council member: "The methodology of Shi'is, which is moderation, logic and freedom of people, as well as leaving the governance of Iraq to its people, has well been crystallized in the wise stances of Ayat Allah Sistani."<sup>60</sup> Khatami's statements indicate that he endorses an elected representative government in Iraq and Grand Ayat Allah Sistani's vision for that process. He implies that efforts to hinder this electoral process are neither in Iraq's nor Iran's national interests. 2005 promises to be a year of change for both Iran and Iraq. In accordance with Article

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<sup>58</sup> *Iranian Media Roundup 19-25 May 04* [Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS) in English] (Caversham BBC Monitoring, 25 May 2004 [cited 2 June 2004]); available from <https://portal.rccb.osis.gov/index.jsp>.

<sup>59</sup> *Iranian Media Roundup 27 April - 3 May 04* ([cited]).

<sup>60</sup> *Iranian Media Roundup 4-10 Apr 04* [Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS) in English] (Caversham BBC Monitoring, 11 April 2004 [cited 2 June 2004]); available from <https://portal.rccb.osis.gov/index.jsp>.

114 of the Iranian Constitution,<sup>61</sup> President Khatami will complete his second and final term in office. During the same year, Iraq is scheduled for a constitutional referendum, national assembly elections and full government elections.<sup>62</sup>

#### **4. Expediency Council Chairman Rafsanjani**

Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani is one of the three most influential and powerful leaders in Iranian politics, religion and the financial world. His family is one of about twelve total families "...with religious ties [that] control much of Iran's \$110 billion gross domestic product and shape its politics, industries and finances."<sup>63</sup> A combination of investments maintains the Rafsanjani family's power: 1) service in numerous theopolitical positions following the Iranian revolution, including President; 2) passing economic legislation that favored his family financially; 3) profits from pistachio farming, real estate, automaking and a private airline; 4) commissions/bribes from foreign investors in exchange for Iranian business contracts; and, 5) a vast patronage network that supports Iran's senior clergy via some of the state-owned Bonyad foundations.<sup>64</sup>

As the former president of Iran, Rafsanjani served two consecutive terms in office from 1989 to 1997, and he

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<sup>61</sup> *The Constitution of The Islamic Republic of Iran* ([cited]).

<sup>62</sup> *Iraq Selfrule Timetable* [Internet] (BBC, 2 June 2004 [cited 2 June 2004]); available from <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/americas/3742383.stm>.

<sup>63</sup> Kambiz Foroohar, *Rafsanjanis Are Iran's Power Brokers for Investors (Update 2)* [Internet] (Bloomberg, 21 April 2004 [cited 7 June 2004]); available from <http://quote.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=nifea&&sid=a7fJPoIAkw5g>.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.* ([cited]).

attempted to amend the constitution in 1996 in order to run for a third term. As chairman of the Expediency Council and deputy chairman for the Assembly of Experts, Rafsanjani continues to play a major political, economic, and religious role in Iran today. The Expediency Council "...has two tasks: break stalemates between the Parliament and the Council of Guardians, and advise the supreme leader in accordance with Articles 110 and 112 of the constitution."<sup>65</sup> Though Rafsanjani and Khomeini were once allies, it appears that Khomeini has prevented Rafsanjani's Expediency Council from weighing in on appropriate legislative stalemates between the *majlis* and Council of Guardians.<sup>66</sup> The 2004 parliamentary election, which was swept by the *traditionalist right*, has potentially increased *majlis*/Council of Guardians cooperation, thus decreasing the Expediency Council's role in mediating disputes and determining legislative outcomes.

As president, Chairman Rafsanjani started out as one of the *modernist right's* most prominent representatives. Following the Iran-Iraq War and Supreme Leader Khomeini's death, he guided Iran's dual transition from revolutionary idealism and state-led socialism to *Realpolitik* pragmatism and state-led capitalism.<sup>67</sup> However, Rafsanjani switched allegiances towards the *traditionalist right* just after leaving office in 1997. According to the Foreign Broadcast Information Service, on 9 April 2004 Rafsanjani made the following statements at Teheran Friday Prayers:

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<sup>65</sup> Buchta, *Who Rules Iran? The Structure of Power in the Islamic Republic*, 61.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Palmer, *The Politics of the Middle East*, 357.

America had become 'vulnerable' in Iraq and America's vulnerability meant Iran had become stronger. The Americans had entered the region in order to weaken Iran, but now 'deep relations' had been established between the people of Iran and Iraq. 'America had entered the region in order to set up a base right outside our borders, but such a base will no longer materialize,' Rafsanjani said, adding that the Americans were now in the region 'as a very effective target.' 'Of course Iran does not wish to get involved in acts of adventurism,' he continued. Rafsanjani described the Jaysh al-Mahdi current in Iraq as consisting of 'very many enthusiastic and heroic young people who were both unhappy with Saddam and the Americans as well as other issues. A nationwide current exists there. They themselves believe that their goals are great.'<sup>68</sup>

Rafsanjani's comments reflect the long lens of regional history that Iran and Iraq have in common. While the United States appears vulnerable, repeating Iran's past revolutionary adventurism mistakes would only serve to renew Iran's isolation and thwart its national interests. The "deep relations" that he refers to may be a comparison between the 1953 Mosaddeq affair, in which the United States and Great Britain intervened in Iranian politics, and the American-led intervention in Iraq today. It is clear that he also empathizes with Iraq and those who resist the occupation.

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<sup>68</sup> *Iranian Media Roundup 4-10 Apr 04* ([cited]).

## **5. The Iranian Military: Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and Artesh (Regular Army)**

General Hassan Firouzabadi, an Artesh officer, serves as the Chief of the Supreme Command Council of the Armed Forces and is also a member of the SCNS.<sup>69</sup> The Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and Artesh are also represented on the SCNS and, since the 1998 Taliban crisis, the Artesh has a supreme commander of co-equal status with the IRGC.<sup>70</sup> Khomeini's decision to strengthen the Artesh demonstrated that post-revolution suspicion of Artesh loyalty was no longer in question. The Taliban crisis also showed that, while the IRGC has better access to regime elites, it "...is increasingly viewed as an overly ideological institution that cannot be trusted for impartial advice on national security matters."<sup>71</sup> The Artesh's SCNS and general elevation served to balance defensive pragmatism against IRGC adventurism inclinations.<sup>72</sup>

Iranian security institutions, like the IRGC and the Artesh, follow their civilian leadership, but also have their own agendas. They each have differing views on Iraq that were influenced by the revolution as well as their Iraq war experiences. The IRGC, for example, still "sees

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<sup>69</sup> *Members of the Supreme National Security Council* [Internet] (NetIran, July 2000 [cited 2 June 2004]); available from <http://www.netiran.com/whoswho.html>.

<sup>70</sup> Buchta, *Who Rules Iran? The Structure of Power in the Islamic Republic*, 147.

<sup>71</sup> Byman et al., *Iran's Security Policy in the Post-Revolutionary Era*, 29.

<sup>72</sup> Buchta, *Who Rules Iran? The Structure of Power in the Islamic Republic*, 147.

itself as a defender of the Iraqi Shi'a."<sup>73</sup> It has trained and supported the military wings of the Iraqi Shi'i groups, like the Supreme Council of the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI)/Badr Corps and the Da'wa Party,<sup>74</sup> that opposed Saddam Hussein and are now represented in Iraq's interim government.

One of the IRGC's showcase efforts at exporting the revolution during the 1980s was its creation of the Lebanese Hezbollah. It was in the early post revolution days that Iran began to support Hezbollah's development financially, materially, and with 1,500 Revolutionary Guard trainers on the ground in Lebanon.<sup>75</sup> Iran enjoyed the early success of exporting its revolution and initially had long-term plans to replace Lebanon's failed confessional government "...with an Islamic order."<sup>76</sup> However, Hezbollah and Iran's close relationship did not always synchronize, for example, Hezbollah's leader, Fadlallah, saw Iran's long-term goal as unrealistic given Lebanon's sectarianism and some Lebanese Shi'is did not welcome Iran's Revolutionary Guards.<sup>77</sup> Nevertheless, thanks to Iranian support (and Syrian tacit approval), Hezbollah became an

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<sup>73</sup> Byman et al., *Iran's Security Policy in the Post-Revolutionary Era*, 58.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 81.

<sup>76</sup> Jaber, *Hezbollah: Born With A Vengeance*, 31.

<sup>77</sup> Juan R.I. Cole and Nikki R. Keddie, eds., *Shi'ism and social protest* (Binghamton: Yale University, 1986), 154, Muhammad Husayn Fadlallah, "Muhammad Husayn Fadlallah: The Palestinians, the Shi'a, and South Lebanon," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 16, no. 2 (1987): 5.

effective fighting and political force that played a major role in hastening Israel's withdrawal from Southern Lebanon in 2000.

The Artesh, on the other hand, has focused on the conventional military threat that Iraq posed over the last two decades. Counter to the IRGC's mission of exporting the revolution and internal security, the Artesh has a much more pragmatic outlook that supports its mission of defending Iran from external threats. Its concerns over a potentially resurgent Iraq are well founded given its experiences with Iraq's last anti-Tehran regime.

## **6. Ministry of Information (MOI)**

Ali Younesi, a cleric, and a career intelligence officer, was appointed Information Minister in 1999 and represents the Ministry of Information on the SCNS. He took over as the top leader of MOI after its implication in a national scandal the year prior.

At the root of the scandal were rogue elements of SAVAMA, the MOI's secret police agency that executed several Tehran dissident intellectuals and writers in 1998 and then attempted to cover it up. Before his appointment to Information Minister, Younesi was the senior officer in charge of investigating these crimes and bringing some of the criminals to justice. His loyalties reportedly lie with Supreme Leader Khomeini and, thus, he also represents the *traditionalist right* on the SCNS.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Jane's, *Iran's Security and Foreign Forces* (Jane's, 12 August 2003 [cited 7 June 2004]); available from [http://www4.janes.com/subscribe/sentinel/GULFS\\_doc\\_view.jsp?Sent\\_Country=Iran&Prod\\_Name=GULFS&K2DocKey=/content1/janesdata/sent/gulfsu/irans140.htm#current#section17](http://www4.janes.com/subscribe/sentinel/GULFS_doc_view.jsp?Sent_Country=Iran&Prod_Name=GULFS&K2DocKey=/content1/janesdata/sent/gulfsu/irans140.htm#current#section17).



The factional tug-of-war has not left the Ministry of Information untouched. SAVAMA has been the target of *Islamic left* and *modernist right* purging since 1997.<sup>79</sup> SAVAMA is primarily tasked with counter-intelligence, internal security, and the protection of Iran's interests beyond its borders. Regarding the latter, Iran has been an example of past foreign policy adventurism vis-à-vis its role in suppressing Iranian dissidents and supporting Shi'is abroad.<sup>80</sup> It is a small force of some 5,000 official agents, but it has an unofficial reserve capacity of approximately 50,000 personnel.<sup>81</sup> Like the IRGC, it is also quite likely that it is still working its Iraqi Shi'i proxies for intelligence collection operations in Iraq.

#### **7. Ministry of Foreign Affairs**

Dr. Kamal Kharrazi was appointed Iran's current foreign minister by President Khatami, just after Khatami's 1997 re-election. He replaced Minister Velayati, a *traditionalist right* Khomeini favorite, but he also holds similar views. His foreign minister duties include service with the SCNS, and he continues to serve as Iran's permanent representative and ambassador to the United Nations. Kharrazi earned a doctorate in education at the University of Houston in 1976.

Iran's Ministry of Foreign Affairs is governed by articles 152-155 of Iran's constitution and is charged with representing Iran's diplomatic interests abroad and at home. The ministry supports a diplomatic training

<sup>79</sup> Byman et al., *Iran's Security Policy in the Post-Revolutionary Era*, 32.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>81</sup> Jane's, *Iran's Security and Foreign Forces* ([cited]).

facility, the International Relations College, and the ministry's think-tank, The Institute for Political and International Studies. Since Iran and the United States have not reestablished formal diplomatic relations, each country maintains an interests desk via a proxy (Switzerland for the U.S., and Pakistan for Iran). Iran and the United States both have embassies in Baghdad.

Dr. Kharrazi's diplomatic efforts have been subject to the factional infighting common to Iranian politics. Kharrazi has been one of Khatami's point men in previous efforts for a rapprochement with the United States. In 1998, President Khatami and Dr. Kharrazi tried to smooth over relations with the West following the Salman Rushdie affair. Their public reassurances that no future Iranian governments would seek to carry out Rushdie's death warrant angered *traditionalist right* critics who did not back them in this decision. Khomeini's original furor was reignited, and the Council of Guardians overruled both Khatami and Kharrazi, which shut down their rapprochement efforts for the time being.<sup>82</sup>

Kharrazi has served as the point man for several hot and cold diplomatic exchanges with the United States. He ran the Afghanistan talks that took place in Geneva following September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001. More recently he met with

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<sup>82</sup> Buchta, *Who Rules Iran? The Structure of Power in the Islamic Republic*, 145-146.

U.S. Senator Joseph Biden for an unplanned and unofficial 90 minute discussion of an undisclosed topic in Davo, Switzerland.<sup>83</sup>

As expected, Foreign Minister Kharrazi does not approve of the U.S.-led coalition's occupation of Iraq. On 6 April 2004 he stated, "The United States should change its attitude towards the Iraqi nation in line with efforts to settle the ongoing crisis in that country and stop the threats, detention, and massacre of the nation because this method has proved inefficient."<sup>84</sup> However, later that same month, at the request of Great Britain and with the tacit approval of the United States, he deployed a diplomatic mission to Iraq in order to try and end the stand-off between coalition forces, Sadr, and Sistani. One of his diplomats was assassinated and the mission did not end successfully.

**D. CONCLUSIONS -- WHAT ARE THE AGENDAS OF THE ACTORS AND INSTITUTIONS THAT DETERMINE IRANIAN SECURITY POLICY TOWARDS IRAQ?**

Iran's multi-polar political system is currently composed of three factional elements - the *Islamic left*, the *traditionalist right*, and the *modernist right*. These factions are all represented in Iran's key national security assessment institution, the Supreme Council for National Security (SCNS). While factional politics do play

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<sup>83</sup> Golnaz Esfandiari, *Iran: Washington, Tehran Hold Rare Talks on Sidelines Of Davos* [Internet] (Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 27 January 2004 [cited 7 June 2004]); available from <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2004/01/573e1c66-461d-4940-bc2f-1aed8b30af29.html>.

<sup>84</sup> *Iranian Media Roundup 4-10 Apr 04* ([cited]).

out in the SCNS, the critical difference from greater Iranian politics is the council's ability to achieve a consensus that satisfies Iran's *Realpolitik* interests. This consensus is largely due to the greater emphasis placed on informal personal networks over formal institutional power.

Post-Saddam events and public statements seem to indicate that the agenda for Iran's key national security assessment body, the SCNS, is multifaceted, but singular in purpose. Recognizing the strong link between Kenneth Waltz's domestic and foreign balance of power politics, Iran is attempting to put its internal political and economic house in order so as to achieve greater effectiveness in the pursuit of its national interests vis-à-vis Iraq and the United States. While part of this agenda appears to be sympathetic towards Iraqi occupation resistance and hopeful for Iraq's self-determined future, in accordance with Iran's national interests, it stops short of advocating Iranian adventurism in Iraq.<sup>85</sup>

The combined influence of key Iranian security policy actors/institutions with formative events in Iranian history provides a useful framework for gaining an

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<sup>85</sup> Recent reporting from STRATFOR indicates that an Iranian group called the Committee for the Commemoration of Martyrs of the World Islamic Movement has begun a campaign to register volunteers for suicide operations against Western targets. A 2002 BBC report reflects a similar previous effort by another *traditionalist right* Iranian group, Ansar-e Hezbollah. While both reports are disturbing, they do not reflect official Iranian security policy, but instead the typical domestic balance of power politics that Iran still struggles with. See *Geopolitical Diary: Sunday, June 6, 2004* [Internet] (STRATFOR, 6 June 2004 [cited 7 June 2004]); available from <http://www.stratfor.biz/Story.neo?storyId=232779>, Sadeq Saba, *Iranian site seeks suicide bombers* [Internet] (BBC, 4 March 2002 [cited 11 June 2004]); available from [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle\\_east/1854460.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/1854460.stm).

understanding of Iran's potential strategy for post-Saddam Iraq. What is still missing from this framework, though, is an understanding of Iran's religiopolitical, geopolitical and economic national interests in Iraq. These interests will be explored in Chapter IV across a vast expanse of almost 1,400 years with the goal of identifying how they influence Iran's strategy for post-Saddam Iraq.

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#### **IV. IRAN'S *REALPOLITIK* INTERESTS IN IRAQ**

Thus far, two of the determinants of Iran's strategy for post-Saddam Iraq are the combined effects of history and personal/institutional agendas. However, according to Anoushiravan Ehteshami, "...interest dictates policy, and history informs it – not the other way around."<sup>86</sup> Given the importance of the *Realpolitik* link between interests and Iran's security policy towards Iraq, this chapter seeks to answer the question, "What are Iran's national interests in Iraq?" They appear to be a combination of religiopolitical, geopolitical, and economic issues that serve as the third, and final, independent variable for Iran's post-Saddam strategy in Iraq. While discussed separately for organizational reasons, these interests are complex and, are often entangled with one another.

##### **A. IRAN'S RELIGIOPOLITICAL INTERESTS IN IRAQ**

Starting with Iran's religiopolitical interests, today Iran is much more religiously homogeneous than Iraq, with Shi'is comprising 89 percent of Iran's total population.<sup>87</sup> Iran's Shi'a co-religionists in neighboring Iraq, on the other hand, comprise approximately 60-65 percent of Iraq's total population<sup>88</sup> and are included in Iraq's Arab, Kurdish, and other ethnic groups. The people of Iran and Iraq today are different from those of almost 1,400 years ago. Still,

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<sup>86</sup> Ehteshami, "Iran-Iraq Relations after Saddam," 115.

<sup>87</sup> CIA, *The World Fact Book 2003* [Internet] (CIA, 18 December 2003 [cited 30 April 2004]); available from [www.odci.gov/cia/publications/factbook/index.html](http://www.odci.gov/cia/publications/factbook/index.html).

<sup>88</sup> Ibid. ([cited]).

those living today have a great appreciation for their ancestors and view their religious histories through a much longer and different lens than do their Western contemporaries. In order to gain a better understanding of present-day Iraqis and Iranians, it is necessary to step back in time and begin looking at Iran's religiopolitical interests via Shi'ism's early origins and its eventual entanglement with Iraq.

### **1. The Shi'a of Iran and Iraq**

Like their Iranian counterparts, the majority of Iraqi Shi'is follow what is known as Twelver Shi'ism. Twelver Shi'ism refers to the lineage of the first 12 Imams<sup>89</sup> that succeeded the Prophet Muhammad after his death in 632. As in Christianity and Messianic Judaism, messianic doctrine is a key pillar of Twelver Shi'ism. The death of the eleventh Imam, Hasan al-'Askari, in 874 left no successor.<sup>90</sup> This succession dilemma was delayed with the occultation of the twelfth Imam, Muhammad al-Mahdi (see Figure 2). As a messiah, Muhammad al-Mahdi is expected to return at the end of days to restore justice to the world and lead the Islamic community.

Shi'is also revere the Prophet Muhammad, as well as his son-in-law, Ali (Islam's fourth Caliph),<sup>91</sup> and both serve as exemplars for Shi'a daily life. Ali is regarded by Shi'is as the Prophet Muhammad's closest companion. The

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<sup>89</sup> "Imam: the supreme leader of the Muslim community; the successor to the Prophet, used commonly by the Shi'a for 'Ali and his descendants." See Ira M. Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies*, Second ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 877.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 95.

<sup>91</sup> "Khalifa: successor of the Prophet and head of the Muslim community; the Caliph:..." See Ibid., 878.



historical lens of injustice found in Shi'ism today originates from two Ali-related events: 1) Ali's delay in succeeding the Prophet until after three of his peers preceded him; and, 2) Ali's assassination shortly thereafter in 661.

The core of the Shi'i sense of injustice, though, is often referred to by outsiders as the Karbala Complex.<sup>92</sup> In 680, Ali's second son, Hussein, contested the rule of the reigning Umayyad (Sunni) caliph, Yazid. On their way to Kufa, Iraq, Hussein ibn Ali and his companions were abandoned by their supporters and intercepted on the plains of Karbala by an overwhelming Umayyad force. Women and children were taken captive, but Hussein and his male companions were martyred there. Hussein's head was taken back to Damascus and delivered to Yazid. So, while Ali is the ancestor of Shi'ism, Hussein's martyrdom increased the ante for countless future Shi'i generations, including those who are shaping Iran and Iraq's post-Saddam relationship today.

**a. *Iran and Iraq's Shi'ism Conversion Story***

Moving ahead to a period spanning from 1501 to 1831, the Iranian and Iraqi Shi'ism conversion stories are interrelated, but quite different. Prior to 1501, most Iranians were Sunni and the world's population of Shi'is was much greater beyond Iran than in it.<sup>93</sup> However, that all changed when the Safavids, a Turkic Sufi mystic order

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<sup>92</sup> W. Andrew Terrill, "The United States and Iraq's Shi'ite Clergy: Partners or Adversaries?," (Carlisle: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2004), 4.

<sup>93</sup> Nikki R. Keddie, *Modern Iran: Roots and Results of Revolution*, Revised and Updated ed. (New Haven & London: Yale University, 2003), 8.

from Azerbaijan, came to power. Their evolution from quietist Sunnism to a fiery brand of Shi'ism aided their struggle for power on the backs of peasant and nomadic tribal revolts.<sup>94</sup> As most who have struggled for great power have done, the Safavids pursued several policies designed to consolidate their power and minimize threats to their regime. Over time, their Shi'ism doctrine rejected their constituency of anarchic tribal followers in favor of Persian bureaucrats and the importing of foreign Twelver clergy "...from nearby Arab-speaking lands."<sup>95</sup> The decision and enforcement of Iran's conversion to Shi'ism also had a strategic determinant. The Safavids sought to create an Iranian-specific Islamic identity in order to receive "...absolute and unquestioning obedience from their Sufi and Qzilbash followers..." and to further separate themselves from their Sunni Ottoman neighbors.<sup>96</sup>

Iran's Shi'ification progressed slowly from 1501 through the next several centuries due to its tribal social structure and relative geographic isolation. In the neighboring frontierland of Iraq, nomadic Arab tribes were not converted until much later through a more peaceful process. Prior to their conversion, these nomadic tribes practiced variations of Sunni Islam and many also integrated their pre-Islam tribal customs.

Unintended consequences were a major catalyst for Iraqi Shi'ism's growth during the follow-on Iranian Qajar dynasty. An Ottoman Empire economic policy significantly

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies*, 234.

increased the number of Iraqi Arab tribal converts to Shi'ism from 1831 onwards. This policy settled previously nomadic Arab tribes in an effort to increase agricultural production and subsequent Ottoman Empire tax revenues. Water access that could support agriculture attracted many of these recently-settled Arab tribes to the two holiest Shi'i shrine cities of Iraq -- Najaf and Karbala.<sup>97</sup>

It was here that these Arab tribes were exposed to established Iranian mujtahids<sup>98</sup> and ulama<sup>99</sup> who sought to expand Iranian Shi'ism in Iraq.<sup>100</sup> The Iranian clergy's justification for this expansion was twofold: 1) they were duty-bound to safeguard the Shi'i stewardship of Najaf and Karbala from Sunni Ottoman Empire encroachment;<sup>101</sup> and, 2) they wanted to expand beyond "...the physical control of the Iranian Qajar monarchy."<sup>102</sup> They focused their conversion efforts on vulnerable Arab "...tribes whose former political and socioeconomic organization had been broken during the transition from nomadic life to agriculture."<sup>103</sup> Though Shi'a holy shrines existed in several Iraqi towns prior to the 1831 spike in Arab tribal converts, it was this period that established a strong link between the Iranian clergy

<sup>97</sup> Yitzhak Nakash, *The Shi'is of Iraq* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 269.

<sup>98</sup> "Mujtahid: a person qualified to exercise *ijtihad* (q.v.) [which is '...reasoning by analogy...in order to reinterpret Islamic law'] and give authoritative opinions on Islamic law." See Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies*, 877 and 880.

<sup>99</sup> "'Ulama': the collective term for the scholars or learned men of Islam." See *Ibid.*, 882.

<sup>100</sup> Nakash, *The Shi'is of Iraq*, 269.

<sup>101</sup> William L. Cleveland, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, Second ed. (Boulder: Westview Press, 2000), 56.

<sup>102</sup> Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies*, 470.

<sup>103</sup> Nakash, *The Shi'is of Iraq*, 269.

and Iraq's Arab tribes. It was also this balance of power period, combined with the earlier Ottoman-Safavid balance of power period, that helped exacerbate today's Sunni-Shi'a sectarian differences in Iraq,<sup>104</sup> as well as further cement Iran's religiopolitical interests in Iraq.

**b. Shi'i Quietism versus Activism and the Mix of Politics and Religion**

The establishment and early development of Shi'ism in Iran and Iraq were both quite different, and they continued to diverge throughout the 20th Century. However, a trend shared by both states is the 20th and 21<sup>st</sup> Century imbalance between Shi'a Quietism and Activism relative to Iran's interests in Iraq. Shi'ism has a long tradition of quietism that has been embraced by most of its clergy for a simple reason - individual and community survival.<sup>105</sup> Sunni persecution of the Shi'a<sup>106</sup> resulted in the theological doctrine of *taqiyyah* (precautionary dissimulation) through which Shi'a individuals and groups are permitted to go so far as to hide their actual Shi'i identities.<sup>107</sup> Quietist Shi'i clergy expect their political leadership counterparts to protect and propagate Shi'ism. If they fail in their duties to do that, a Quietism nuance includes taking action to remedy that. This differs from

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<sup>104</sup> Cleveland, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, 58.

<sup>105</sup> Amatzia Baram, *The Iraqi Shi'i Community: Between Sistani, Muqtada, the IGC, and the CPA* [Internet] (United States Institute of Peace, 21 April 2004 [cited 29 April 2004]); available from [http://www.usip.org/aboutus/congress/testimony/2004/0421\\_baram.html](http://www.usip.org/aboutus/congress/testimony/2004/0421_baram.html).

<sup>106</sup> The persecution has gone both ways. When the Persian Safavid dynasty was consolidating its power in Iran through the establishment of Shi'ism as the state religion, a great number of Sufis and Sunnis were displaced, killed, and/or forced to convert.

<sup>107</sup> Baram, *The Iraqi Shi'i Community: Between Sistani, Muqtada, the IGC, and the CPA* ([cited]).

Activism in that the combination of religious and political power is not the desired endstate since corrective action is much more limited in scope. For example, in 1920, the Iraqi Shi'i clergy cooperated with their Sunni brethren and incited a revolt against occupying British forces. The Shi'i clergy based this decision upon two perceived threats: 1) the British threat to Islam in Iraq and abroad; and 2) the British threat to Shi'i clergy status via their attempts to control sources of religious income.<sup>108</sup> Another example of Iraqi Shi'i quietist clergy "stepping in" to take corrective action is Grand Ayat Allah Sistani's current efforts to hasten the return of Iraqi sovereignty, national elections, and an acceptable constitution.

In neighboring Iran, Ayat Allah Khomeini's activism contrasted sharply with this quietist approach. He saw efforts to reform Iran's constitutional monarchy as pointless. Instead, Khomeini opted for a revolutionary concept of governing via clerical rule called *vilayat-i faqih*. Since, in Khomeini's view, "...monarchy was incompatible with Islam...he insisted that the clergy should rule...in the absence of the Hidden Twelfth Imam."<sup>109</sup> Khomeini's efforts are regarded as the extreme of Shi'i clerical activism today.

Sayyed Muqtada al-Sadr, in present day Iraq, is the most well known example of Shi'i clerical activism and supporter of *vilayat-i faqih*. Sadr is a young Arab man whose religious training is not advanced relative to more

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<sup>108</sup> Nakash, *The Shi'is of Iraq*, 67.

<sup>109</sup> Juan Cole, "The Iraqi Shi'ites: On the history of America's would-be allies," *Boston Review*, October/November 2003.

senior Shi'i clerics. However, he leads Jamaat Al-Sadr Al-Thani (the Sadr II movement) which is one of the two larger "camps" amongst Iraqi Shi'is.<sup>110</sup> He has a large following among Baghdad's urban poor as well as a growing power-base in Kufa, Najaf and Karbala, where he is viewed by many as closer to the people than other Shi'a clerics. In contrast to other prominent Iraqi Shi'i clerics who oppose combining religious and political power, Sadr "...calls on Shi'a spiritual leaders to play an active role in shaping Iraq's political future."<sup>111</sup> Like his renowned grandfather and father, Sadr supports Khomeini's *vilayat-i faqih* that now runs Iran and would like to implement it in Iraq.

In an effort to tip the clerical balance of power in his favor and to compensate for his youth/clerical inexperience, Sadr has criticized his competitors who oppose *vilayat-i faqih*, especially those who have cross-border ties with Iran (like Sistani), and those who fled during Saddam Hussein's persecution.<sup>112</sup> Sadr portrays

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<sup>110</sup> *The Al-Sadr Movement: A New Faction Emerges in Iraq?* [Internet] (STRATFOR, 25 May 2003 [cited 24 March 2004]); available from <http://www.stratfor.biz/Story.neo?storyId=217921>. The other large "camp" is led by Grand Ayat Allah Ali al-Sistani who is allied with the Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI). According to Harvard's eminent Islamic scholar Roy Mottahedeh (as reported by Eric Herschtal on 19 November 2003 in *The Daily Princetonian*), Sistani was once a student at the Shi'i school founded by Muqtada Al-Sadr's grandfather, Mohammad Baqir Al-Sadr, in the 1960s. A third, but smaller, camp of Shi'is are the secularist, former U.S.-backed, Iraqi National Congress lead by Ahmed Chalabi.

<sup>111</sup> *Profile: Moqtada Sadr* [Internet] (BBC, 26 September 2003 [cited 24 March 2004]); available from [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle\\_east/3131330.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/3131330.stm).

<sup>112</sup> *The Al-Sadr Movement: A New Faction Emerges in Iraq?* ([cited). Nicholas Blanford of the Christian Science Monitor reports that "many senior clerics in Najaf are of Iranian descent, whereas the Sadrs are Arabs of Iraqi-Lebanese origin." See Nicholas Blanford, "Iran, Iraq, and two Shiite visions," *The Christian Science Monitor*, 20 February 2004.

"...himself as an indigenous Iraqi Shi'i leader..."<sup>113</sup> and further appeals to Iraqi nationalism by vehemently denying that he is a tool of Iranian foreign policy in Iraq.<sup>114</sup> Ethnicity matters in Iraq, and this has worried Iran's most senior clerics, many of whom "...regard Mr. Sadr as a pan-Arabist bigot, and fear that he plans to end a long tradition of Iranian influence over Iraq's main Shi'a seminary, in the town of Najaf."<sup>115</sup>

In addition to Sadr's *Realpolitik* motivations, his current xenophobic rhetoric originates, in part, from an earlier period in Iraqi history described by Yitzhak Nakash as "The Blow to the Status of Persians."<sup>116</sup> During the 1920s, the British-mandated Iraqi government pursued legislation designed to decrease Iranian influence in Iraq.<sup>117</sup> They passed the Iraqi Nationality Law of 1924 which automatically considered all Iranians living in Iraq "...as Iraqi nationals unless they themselves renounced it by a fixed date..."<sup>118</sup> Additional laws were passed that forbade Iranian land ownership in Iraq, thus compelling Iranians to choose Iraqi citizenship in order to keep from losing their

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<sup>113</sup> *The Al-Sadr Movement: A New Faction Emerges in Iraq?* ([cited]).

<sup>114</sup> *Lebanon: Iraqi Shi'ite Leader Denies Aiding Iran* [Internet] (STRATFOR, 5 November 2003 [cited 24 March 2004]); available from <http://www.stratfor.biz/Story.neo?storyId=224372>.

<sup>115</sup> "Iranian influence in Iraq: Tetchy neighbours," *The Economist*, 24 April 2004.

<sup>116</sup> Nakash, *The Shi'is of Iraq*, 100.

<sup>117</sup> According to Nakash, Iraq's concern over Iranian influence was warranted. Iran refused to recognize Iraq as a state, and Iran did not want to give up its religious and economic stewardship over the shrine cities of Najaf and Karbala which fall within Iraq's borders.

<sup>118</sup> Nakash, *The Shi'is of Iraq*, 101.

livelihoods.<sup>119</sup> Similar balance of power contests would take place all the way up through Saddam Hussein's regime.

Indeed, Sadr's previously cordial relationship with Iran now appears to be strained. Sadr's Iranian source of authority, Ayat Allah Kazim al-Ha'iri, recently pledged to distance himself from Sadr and attempt to dismantle Sadr's militia. This pledge was made under the condition that the investigation of Sadr's suspected role in the killing of Ayat Allah al-Khu'i be delayed until after the 30 June 2004 formation of an interim Iraqi government.<sup>120</sup>

The very developmental differences in Iranian and Iraqi Shi'ism and their Quietism/Activism imbalance addressed here have forged an irrefutable religiopolitical link that has determined many of Iran's interests in Iraq today. Iran has an interest in preserving its Shi'i leadership role both world-wide and in Iraq. In terms of pilgrimage shrines and centers of Shi'a religious learning, Iraq is the major Shi'a homeland where many of Iran's clerics have studied.<sup>121</sup> Iran's past religiopolitical leadership role has exerted a significant degree of influence amongst many of Iraq's Shi'a clergy, as well as in other countries with significant Shi'i populations, like Pakistan, Bahrain, Kuwait, Lebanon, Palestine, and

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 108.

<sup>120</sup> Ali Nurizadeh, *Iranian Sources: Ayatollah Al-Ha'iri Will Return to Iraq Pledging to Control Muqtada al-Sadr* [Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS) translation from Arabic] (London Al-Sharq al-Awsat, 28 April 2004 [cited 1 May 2004]); available from <https://portal.rccb.osis.gov/index.jsp>.

<sup>121</sup> Byman et al., *Iran's Security Policy in the Post-Revolutionary Era*, 57.



Afghanistan. Recently, this influence was tacitly recognized by members of the U.S. led coalition when they requested Iranian diplomatic assistance, aimed at solving Najaf's three-way stalemate between Sadr, Sistani, and coalition forces.<sup>122</sup> In addition to Iran's religiopolitical interests, it also has geopolitical and economic concerns that influence its post-Saddam strategy for Iraq and these will be examined throughout the two remaining sections of this chapter.

## **B. IRAN'S GEOPOLITICAL INTERESTS IN IRAQ**

In Chapter III, the decisionmaking process of Iran's chief national security assessment body, the Supreme Council for National Security, was examined and consensus was found in its policy recommendations. Here the geopolitical interests of that organization's three main political factions -- the *Islamic left*, *traditionalist right*, and *modernist right* -- will be examined relative to Iraq.

### **1. Preventing a Resurgent Iraqi Security Threat**

Throughout history, Iran's geostrategic position has been a factor in the numerous invasions across its northern, western and eastern borders. The most recent threats Iran faced were from the Soviet Union during the Cold War, Iraq under Saddam Hussein, and the Taliban in Afghanistan. Generations of foreign threats have significantly influenced the national Iranian psyche, and

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<sup>122</sup> Hesamoddin Rad, *Clerical Diplomacy is Iran's Winning Card in Iraq* [Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS) translation from Persian] (Tehran Tose'eh, 17 April 2004 [cited 1 May 2004]); available from <https://portal.rccb.osis.gov/index.jsp>.

specifically the *modernist right*. It has been the chief champion for countering foreign threats, especially a resurgent one from Iraq.

Iran has pursued several policies designed to counter an Iraqi threat, including sponsorship of anti-Saddam insurgency groups and the adoption of a ballistic missile doctrine and a fielded capability. SCIRI and its military wing, the Badr Corps, serve as Iran's proxies in Iraq. They were a consistent Shi'i thorn in the side of Saddam Hussein's regime. Since the SCIRI/Badr Corps' inception, Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) financed, trained, and supplied them, and reportedly continues to do so today. According to RAND, before Operation Iraqi Freedom, the IRGC was "...prepared...for swift action should Baghdad become more vulnerable in the south, or should its worsening situation require greater Iranian intervention."<sup>123</sup> With Saddam Hussein's regime gone, SCIRI and the Badr Corps are no longer beholden to the IRGC, but it is likely that a concerned Iran is still the benefactor of SCIRI's robust intelligence collection efforts against its Sunni and Shi'i rivals, as well as coalition forces.

**a. Iranian Missiles and the Nuclear Debate**

The human and economic costs of Iran's war with Iraq influence Iranian security policymaking today. Iran has a large veteran's population, many of whom now hold government office. Their wartime experiences and lessons

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<sup>123</sup> Byman et al., *Iran's Security Policy in the Post-Revolutionary Era*, 58.

learned have lead to improved doctrine, training and modernization of the Iranian military.<sup>124</sup>

During the 1988 War of the Cities, Tehran was targeted numerous times by Iraqi SCUD missiles. By 1986, Iraq had inflicted almost 10,000 casualties against Iranian ground troops with its chemical weapons arsenal.<sup>125</sup> Both of these experiences and the perceived threat from Israel, influenced Iran's decision to pursue ballistic missile development with the assistance of Libya, Syria, North Korea, China, and Pakistan.<sup>126</sup>

Even though Saddam Hussein's regime is no longer a threat, in the eyes of several states, Iran still appears to be pursuing nuclear weapons. Iran's nuclear weapon ambitions have been under the scrutiny of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), Europe, and the United States, in recent years. Iran's nuclear capabilities have not been confirmed, but Pakistan's assistance towards that end has been.

Iran's *modernist right* has correctly perceived the changes in the regional security environment. In 2003, Iran witnessed the failure of Saddam Hussein's perceived chemical and biological weapons threat to deter the United

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>125</sup> *Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988)* [Internet] (Federation of American Scientists (FAS), 21 December 1999 [cited 6 June 2004]); available from <http://web.archive.org/web/20030630105220/http://fas.org/man/dod-101/ops/war/iran-iraq.htm>.

<sup>126</sup> Jane's, *Armed Forces, Iran* (Jane's, 12 August 2003 [cited 14 May 2004]); available from [http://www4.janes.com/subscribe/sentinel/GULFS\\_doc\\_view.jsp?Sent\\_Country=Iran&Prod\\_Name=GULFS&K2DocKey=/content1/janesdata/sent/gulfsu/irans100.htm#current#section6](http://www4.janes.com/subscribe/sentinel/GULFS_doc_view.jsp?Sent_Country=Iran&Prod_Name=GULFS&K2DocKey=/content1/janesdata/sent/gulfsu/irans100.htm#current#section6).

States' new strategy of preemptive attack.<sup>127</sup> Furthermore, the Bush administration's 2002 'axis of evil' speech and public desire for Iranian regime change have also increased Iran's paranoia.<sup>128</sup> Comparing Iraq's political outcome with North Korea's, Pakistan's, and India's has confirmed for Iran that developing nuclear weapons is a pragmatic decision that is in its best security interests - and not just to deter a resurgent Iraq. Given Iran's historical past, scientific capability, and foreign threats it has faced, almost any country in identical circumstances would make the same pragmatic decision.

## **2. Iran's Influence in Iraq and Rapprochement with the United States**

Given the international perception that the U.S.-led coalition is bogged down in Iraq, Iran's *modernist right* and *Islamic left* see an opportunity to improve relations with the United States. Taking its cue from Libya, Iran recognizes that Iraq is an opportunity for it to also "come in from the cold." While renouncing its nuclear weapons program is not likely, Iran can and has weighed in on sensitive negotiations with Iraqi Shi'is over the three-way standoff between Sistani, Sadr, and coalition forces as seen earlier in this chapter. There is precedent for similar Iranian low-key actions: 1) intelligence and targeting assistance during the U.S. air campaign against Taliban forces; and, 2) assistance with the initial setup of Afghanistan's Karzai government in Bonn.<sup>129</sup> In a classic

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<sup>127</sup> Wyn Q. Bowen and Joanna Kidd, "The Iranian nuclear challenge," *International Affairs* 80, no. 2 (2004): 265.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.: 264.

<sup>129</sup> Scott Peterson, *The Christian Science Monitor*, Email to Ryan Gutzwiller, 29 October 2003.

example of Robert Axelrod's Tit-for-Tat international relations theory,<sup>130</sup> the United States also took quiet action and renewed its temporary suspension of sanctions on 'humanitarian' items to Iran.<sup>131</sup> Additionally, Anoushiravan Ehteshami stated: "Iran's moderates and pragmatists point to the rapid dismantling of U.S. military deployments in Saudi Arabia as proof that Washington has no intention of targeting Iran and further argue that the United States may well be ready for inclusive discussions about collective security arrangements in this vital subregion."<sup>132</sup>

Further adding credibility to this observation is the recent calculated promise from the United States and several of its coalition partners "...to...pull their troops out of Iraq, if asked by a new Iraqi government" to do so.<sup>133</sup> This statement is definitely in accordance with the geopolitical interests of Iran's *modernist right* and *Islamic left*. Both of these factions realize that geopolitical and economic isolation have hampered Iran, but it appears that some of their low-key conciliatory gestures are being reciprocated by the United States and, even more so, by the European Union.

### **3. Iran's Defense Via an American Quagmire in Iraq**

Iran's *traditionalist right* were perplexed and angered by the Bush administration's 2002 and 2003 anti-regime

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<sup>130</sup> Robert Axelrod, *The Evolution of Cooperation* (New York: Basic Books, 1984), Chapters 1 and 3.

<sup>131</sup> Catherine Hunter, "Is the Iran-Libya Sanctions Act Dead?," *World Markets Analysis*, April 26 2004.

<sup>132</sup> Ehteshami, "Iran-Iraq Relations after Saddam," 127.

<sup>133</sup> *Coalition troops 'may quit Iraq'* [Internet] (BBC, 15 May 2004 [cited 15 May 2004]); available from [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle\\_east/3716519.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/3716519.stm).

public pronouncements and felt that their geopolitical interests had been threatened. These statements, combined with Iran's memory of the 1953 Muhammad Mosaddeq affair<sup>134</sup> and the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq, have caused real fear that Iran is now the target of another Middle East regime change effort. Additionally, a 2002 Gallup Poll conducted in Iran found that 76% of Iranians perceived the United States as aggressive, while a majority of others expressed unfavorable perceptions of ruthlessness, conceit, arrogance, and easy provocation.<sup>135</sup> Therefore, many of Iran's *traditionalist right* believe that it would be in Iran's best security interests to covertly support anti-coalition operations in Iraq in order to keep the United States pre-occupied with its immediate Iraq problems. There is no conclusive evidence that this post-Saddam strategy has been adopted, but there is conflicting reporting.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> The Mosaddeq Affair is widely regarded by older Iranians as an unjustified act of foreign intervention. It was one of the first combined regime change efforts undertaken by the intelligence services of the United States and Great Britain in the Middle East.

<sup>135</sup> Richard Burkholder, "The United States -- Through Iranian Eyes," (Washington D.C.: The Gallup Organization, 2002). Burkholder states that "Gallup interviewed a scientifically selected nationwide sample of 1,500 Iranian adults - arguably the most comprehensive sounding of Iranian public opinion in the past quarter century."

<sup>136</sup> For examples of conflicting reporting see, Massimo Calabresi and Adam Zagorin, *Is Iran Provoking the Unrest? Iran has allies in the country, thanks to Iraq's large Shi'ite population* [Internet] (Time Magazine, 11 April 2004 [cited 15 April 2004]); available from <http://www.time.com/time/archive/preview/0,10987,1101040419-610061,00.html>, David Ignatius, "What Iran Wants In Iraq," *Washington Post*, 27 February 2004, Ralph Peters, *Iraq - What to do? Drop the Hammer Now* (New York Post, 12 April 2004 [cited 15 May 2004]); available from [http://www.defenddemocracy.org/research\\_topics/research\\_topics\\_show.htm?doc\\_id=220909&attrib\\_id=7511](http://www.defenddemocracy.org/research_topics/research_topics_show.htm?doc_id=220909&attrib_id=7511), Katherine Pfleger Shrader, *U.S. Trying to Sort Out Iran Role in Iraq* [Internet] (Associated Press, 11 May 2004 [cited 15 May 2004]); available from <http://www.heraldonline.com/24hour/world/story/1358723p-8570305c.html>.

**a. An Iraqi Democracy and Its Consequences for Iran**

In addition to the United States' regime change threat, many of Iran's *traditionalist right* feel threatened by the prospect of a successful democracy in Iraq. This feeling has been reinforced as far back as 1997, when Iran's population demonstrated a growing lack of confidence in clerical rule through the election of reformist presidential candidate, Muhammad Khatami and his subsequent 2001 re-election. Though not exclusive to the Iranian government, a Gallup poll also found that "...only 23% of Iranians selected the assertion that people in Islamic societies 'are free in controlling their own lives and futures.'" <sup>137</sup> While Iran is not ripe for another revolution, the political empowerment of the Iraqi Shi'is may inspire domestic challenges for Iran's ruling elite. Putting this issue in perspective, Anoushiravan Ehteshami had this to say:

...a new and powerful [Iraqi] source of religious authority beyond Tehran's control could act as a lightning rod, seriously testing the doctrinal basis of a regime founded on a fairly narrow interpretation of Shi'a thought. Najaf's rise will not only challenge Qom and give Arab Shi'is a bigger say in Shi'a affairs (from Lebanon to Yemen) but will also raise considerable intellectual support for those forces in the Iranian power structure who now openly question the prudence of religiouspolitical authority centralized in the hands of the Faqih (the "Leader," or just jurist) and a small group of

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<sup>137</sup> Richard Burkholder, "Iranians Assess Their Future," in *Gallup Poll of the Islamic World*, ed. Richard Burkholder (Washington D.C.: The Gallup Organization, 2002), 35.

his trusted allies in the Guardian Council, the judiciary and security forces, and the Expediency Council.<sup>138</sup>

Ehteshami's theopolitical scenario is a direct threat to Iran's ruling elite and openly acknowledges the perception of failure for Iran's revolution. In this scenario, Iran's *traditionalist right* definitely have a geopolitical interest in undermining the American-led coalition in Iraq.

***b. Iraq's Fragmentation and Its Consequences for Iran***

Though Iran's *traditionalist right* may not want a successful democracy in Iraq, they also do not want anarchy. According to Hasan Qashqavi, a member of the Iranian parliament's National Security and Foreign Policy Committee, "The strategy of...Iran is the immediate establishment of stability and the return of calm and tranquility to Iraq. When this happens, the interests of Iran will be served well."<sup>139</sup>

Iran is not interested in an Iraqi civil war or fragmentation of the Iraqi state into sectarian statelets. With that in mind, Iran is critical of the Iraq model being pursued by the United States and Great Britain today --

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<sup>138</sup> Ehteshami, "Iran-Iraq Relations after Saddam," 125.

<sup>139</sup> Qashqavi: *Iran and America must accept one another as two influential realities* [Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS) translation from Persian] (Tehran Aftab-e Yazd (Internet Version-WWW), 27 April 2004 [cited 1 May 2004]); available from <https://portal.rccb.osis.gov/index.jsp>.



which some perceive as the defacto division of Iraq into ethnic groups and religious sects.<sup>140</sup>

In Iran's view (as well as Turkey's), the current model of ethnic division did not start after Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2003. It followed immediately after 1991's Operation Desert Storm. Saddam Hussein, having survived the war, but then facing an internal Kurdish/Shi'i revolt, deployed the Iraqi army to crush the uprising. The United States undertook Operations Provide Comfort and Northern Watch in order to stop further Kurdish persecution and avoid a humanitarian crisis. This resulted in the creation and sustainment of a semi-autonomous Kurdish state in northern Iraq.<sup>141</sup> Laith Kubba observed that, "Iraqi Kurds...opened a Pandora's Box on future alternatives in Iraq that will have far-reaching effects on both Iran and Turkey."<sup>142</sup> With Kurds making up seven percent of Iran and 20 percent of Turkey's population,<sup>143</sup> both states are concerned about Iraqi Kurdish autonomy and how that may inspire Iran and Turkey's own minorities to emulate them.

Prior Minister of Culture, Dr. Parvis Varjavand, even goes so far as to say that the current ethnic identity

<sup>140</sup> *Iran's Cultural Potential Under New Regional Order* [Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS) translation from Persian] (Tehran Yas-e Now (Internet Version - WWW), 17 June 2003 [cited 1 May 2004]); available from <https://portal.rccb.osis.gov/index.jsp>.

<sup>141</sup> Iraqi Shi'is were infuriated by perceived U.S. duplicity. In their eyes, not only did the United States not support the rebellion it had encouraged, but it demonstrated overt racism by embracing the Kurds and ignoring the Shi'is. Not unexpectedly, the Kurds of northern Iraq hold a very favorable view of the United States, while Shi'i opinion has been much more guarded.

<sup>142</sup> Laith Kubba, "Domestic Politics in a Post-Saddam Iraq," in *Iran, Iraq, and the Arab Gulf States*, ed. Joseph A. Kechichian (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 69.

<sup>143</sup> CIA, *The World Fact Book 2003* ([cited]).

mindset is a danger to Iranian national security.<sup>144</sup> With an ethnically heterogeneous population that is 51 percent Persian, 24 percent Azeri, eight percent Gilaki and Mazandarani, seven percent Kurd, three percent Arab, two percent Lur, two percent Baloch, two percent Turkmen, and one percent other,<sup>145</sup> Iran's fears are similar to Syria's vis-à-vis Lebanon - the ethnic fragmentation of a neighboring state sets a dangerous precedent for one's own ethnic minorities and continued state solidarity.

One of the more recent concerns for Iraq's Arab Shi'i and Iran, no doubt, is the perception of Kurdish efforts to incorporate economically powerful Kirkuk into its sphere influence.<sup>146</sup> In February 2004, Muqtada al-Sadr's Mahdi army, along with other Shi'i militias, deployed to the oil-rich city of Kirkuk in northern Iraq.<sup>147</sup> It is possible that Sadr sees Kirkuk's demographic disputes as an opportunity to gain Arab Shi'i dominance locally, as well as prevent the loss of oil revenue to the semi-autonomous Kurdish provincial government. Sadr anticipates that Iraq's future central government will, at the very least, be Arab Shi'i dominated and both he, and Iran, fear that the Kurds will not respond well to it. More importantly, for Iran's geopolitical interests, it is once again concerned about the consequences that an affluent and autonomous Iraqi Kurdish population will have on its own Kurdish minority.

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<sup>144</sup> *Iran's Cultural Potential Under New Regional Order* ([cited]).

<sup>145</sup> CIA, *The World Fact Book 2003* ([cited]).

<sup>146</sup> Nicholas Blanford, "Ethnic divide deepens in new Iraq," *The Christian Science Monitor*, 8 March 2004.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*

### **C. IRAN'S ECONOMIC INTERESTS IN IRAQ**

Like Iran's geopolitical interests in Iraq, Iran's economic interests are at both ends of the spectrum as well. Iran is concerned about future competition with Iraq as well as profitable investment and trade. Undermining Iraq, and the coalition, will prolong the occupation and postpone normal economic relations with Iran. According to Hasan Qashqavi, a member of the Iranian parliament's National Security and Foreign Policy Committee, improving "...Iran's economic relations with Iraq...is something which can bring about growth and prosperity to the economies of both countries."<sup>148</sup> Three key economic interests for Iran, vis-à-vis Iraq, will be examined - oil competition, general reconstruction, and Shi'ism-related commerce.

#### **1. Oil Competition**

Iran's oil industry has always been viewed by Iranians with ambivalence. Since Iranian oil was first discovered by a British company in 1908, it has been seen as both a curse, with respect to the foreign economic domination it brought -- and a blessing, in terms of the financial revenues it has produced for Iran's rentier economy. Today, Iran is OPEC's second largest oil producer and holds seven percent of the world's proven oil reserves. It also has the world's second largest natural gas reserves.<sup>149</sup> Iran's oil industry and economy, though, have been hindered by the fallout from Iran's 1979 revolution and competition

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<sup>148</sup> Qashqavi: *Iran and America must accept one another as two influential realities* ([cited]).

<sup>149</sup> *Iran Country Analysis Brief* [Internet] (Energy Information Administration, U.S. Department of Energy, November 2003 [cited 16 May 2004]); available from <http://www.eia.doe.gov/emeu/cabs/iran.html>.

from a resurgent Iraq, in an already tight oil market, is a major concern for Iran.

In 1996, the United States passed the Iran-Libya Sanctions Act (ILSA), which was supposed to eliminate the competitive imbalance by prohibiting U.S. companies and their non-U.S. competitors from investing in Iran. However, this controversial law was not embraced by European or Asian governments and the net result has been just the opposite - only U.S. companies have been locked out of Iran. Despite ILSA, Iran has been the recipient of over \$30 billion dollars worth of investment in its oil industry from mostly European companies.<sup>150</sup> Furthermore, ILSA helped Iran eventually pass a 2002 "Law on the Attraction and Protection of Foreign Investment" which courts foreign investors within the confines of Iran's constitution.<sup>151</sup> The recent U.S. repeal of most ILSA sanctions against Libya, combined with a perceived lack of U.S. will to continue pressing Iran, has caused several close U.S. allies in Japan and Europe to aggressively pursue further investments in Iran's oil industry<sup>152</sup> which will boost Iran's competitive economic edge vis-à-vis a potentially resurgent Iraq.

Almost nine years of war and 13 years of economic sanctions severely crippled Iraq's oil industry, and much of it fell into disrepair. During those difficult years, Iraq's "...struggling...oil industry...helped protect Iran's share of the global oil market and maintain stable and

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<sup>150</sup> Hunter, "Is the Iran-Libya Sanctions Act Dead?."

<sup>151</sup> *Iran Country Analysis Brief* ([cited]).

<sup>152</sup> Hunter, "Is the Iran-Libya Sanctions Act Dead?."

sometimes high prices for oil."<sup>153</sup> However, with an estimated 112 to 115 billion barrels of crude oil reserves, Iraq is third in the world only to Saudi Arabia and Canada<sup>154</sup> and, while Iraq is an OPEC member, it has not been constrained by OPEC quotas since 1996.<sup>155</sup> The current U.S.-led reconstruction effort, and the potential realization of Iraq's full oil production capacity, gives Iran cause for concern about its place in the future world oil market and the safeguarding of its economic interests.

## **2. Iraq's Reconstruction**

At the April 2004 Iranian Trade Council meeting in Dubai, UAE, Iran's Foreign Ministry director-general for Persian Gulf affairs, Hoseyn Sadeqi, reported on his delegation's recent trip to Iraq: "Contrary to the diverse reports about the situation in Iraq, the process of reconstruction has started in the country, but at a slow pace."<sup>156</sup> Though Iraq's future still holds much uncertainty, Sadeqi was optimistic that Iran stands to benefit from investing in Iraq's reconstruction -- if it participates in the process. He stated that:

If Iranian companies wait until total stability prevails in Iraq before they carry out economic and commercial activities there, it may take until 2010. Iran's economic and development institutions must have the required daring to be

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<sup>153</sup> Jon B. Alterman, "Not in My Backyard: Iraq's Neighbor's Interests," *The Washington Quarterly* 26, no. 3 (2003): 149.

<sup>154</sup> "8.1 World Crude Oil and Natural Gas Reserves, January 1, 2003," in *Microsoft Excel*, ed. table81.xls (Energy Information Administration, U.S. Department of Energy, 2004).

<sup>155</sup> *Iran Country Analysis Brief* ([cited]).

<sup>156</sup> *Foreign Ministry official encourages Iranian companies to be active in Iraq* [Internet] (BBC, 27 April 2004 [cited 16 May 2004]); available from <http://nexis.com>.

present in Iraq so that they can play a part in the country's reconstruction.<sup>157</sup>

Iran eagerly awaits Iraq's election of a National Assembly in January 2005, so that it can directly negotiate its reconstruction participation without American interference. "Iran sees Iraq as a critical trading pipeline with the rest of the Middle East, from which it has been locked out for decades."<sup>158</sup> According to Hasan Qashqavi, what is at stake in Iraq is "...a [projected] trade volume of a minimum of 5 billion dollars between Iraq and...Iran."<sup>159</sup>

Iran's economic interest in Iraq's reconstruction is motivated by two factors. First, Iran seeks a way to recover the financial losses that it has suffered since its lucrative oil smuggling operations with Saddam Hussein's regime were stopped last year. The U.S. Navy's 5<sup>th</sup> Fleet, whose area of responsibility includes the Persian Gulf, estimated Iraqi oil smuggling operations at \$500 million or more for 2000.<sup>160</sup> Second, with 80 percent of Iran's foreign exchange earnings coming from the export of petroleum products, Iran badly needs to diversify its own economy and

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<sup>157</sup> Ibid.([cited]).

<sup>158</sup> Calabresi and Zagorin, *Is Iran Provoking the Unrest? Iran has allies in the country, thanks to Iraq's large Shi'ite population* ([cited]).

<sup>159</sup> Qashqavi: *Iran and America must accept one another as two influential realities* ([cited]).

<sup>160</sup> Raymond Tanter, *How Much of an Axis and How Evil?* (The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 7 February 2002 [cited 16 May 2004]); available from <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/watch/policywatch/policywatch2002/602.htm>. Oil smuggling has not been eliminated, but the government-to-government cooperation between Iran and Iraq has.

curb its 14.3 percent inflation rate.<sup>161</sup> Increased trade with neighboring Iraq will help Iran accomplish that, and, with Iran's industries having largely recovered from the war with Iraq, they are now in a position to do that.

### **3. Shi'ism-Related Commerce**

New found freedom has resulted in the generation of major revenues for Iraq's shrine cities of Najaf and Karbala. Dilip Hiro observed that "Iranian Shi'as are pouring into Iraq, which has six holy Shi'a sites, across the unguarded border at the rate of 10,000 a day. They are thus bolstering the Iraqi economy to the tune of about \$2 billion a year, equivalent to two-fifths of Iraq's oil revenue in 2003."<sup>162</sup>

In addition to the surge in Iranian pilgrims, Najaf is also experiencing an increase in "corpse traffic." Najaf's large cemetery, Wadi al-Salam, has been the most sought-after resting place in the Shi'i world. According to Shi'ism, it is located on the very edge of the entrance to Heaven. In addition to the increased pilgrimage revenue, families burying their dead are also making major financial contributions to Najaf's hospitality industry and clerical establishment.<sup>163</sup>

In and of itself, Najaf's new commerce is not a significant concern for Iran. What does concern Iran is

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<sup>161</sup> "Iran," (The Political Risk Services Group, Inc., 2003), 1, 6-7. Iran's 14.3% inflation rate was for 2002. Iran's 1998-2002 average rate of inflation was 15.6%. For comparison, the United States' 1999-2003 average rate of inflation was 2.4%.

<sup>162</sup> Hiro, *Analysis: Iran's influence in Iraq* ([cited]).

<sup>163</sup> Yitzhak Nakash, "Najaf, Renewed; The religious center sways the world's 170 million Shi'ites -- and its clerics will play an enormous role in the evolution of Iraq," *Newsweek*, 1 March 2004.

the overall effect that Najaf's revival may have on the current center of Shi'i learning and worldwide influence - Qom, Iran. With the influence of over 170 million<sup>164</sup> Shi'is worldwide at stake, the religiopolitical consequences of Najaf's seemingly insignificant economic boom takes on much greater importance for Iran.

#### **D. CONCLUSION--WHAT ARE IRAN'S NATIONAL INTERESTS IN IRAQ?**

This third, and final, independent variable in Iran's post-Saddam strategy for Iraq is made up of a complex, seemingly disparate, mix of *Realpolitik* national interests. Like the formative history and select group of actors and institutions that preceded them, Iran's national interests are a critical *Realpolitik* link in the Iranian security policy chain for Iraq.

Kenneth Waltz's domestic and foreign *Realpolitik* balances of power spanning from the earliest periods of Shi'i development through the present time, are interwoven into an array of Iranian religiopolitical, geopolitical, and economic national interests. The common denominator for Iran's strong religiopolitical interests is continued influence with Iraq's Shi'i clergy. Without this influence, Iran's identity as the protector of Iraq's sacred Shi'i shrines, its role at the top of the Shi'i worldwide hierarchy, and the preservation of its *vilayat-i faqih* religiopolitical system are all at varying degrees of risk.

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<sup>164</sup> Ibid.



Whether a resurgent Iraqi threat, rapprochement with the United States, or an Iraqi quagmire, the entanglement of Iran's factional politics and geopolitical interests significantly impacts its post-Saddam strategy for Iraq. The *traditionalist right's* interest in creating an Iraqi quagmire works counter to Iran's overarching national interests and may hasten the very regime change efforts that they fear. Boggling down the U.S.-led coalition further will prolong Iraq's occupation, exacerbate its alleged sectarian fragmentation, and derail Iran's post-war reconstruction/economic recovery when coalition bombs begin to fall on Tehran.

Iran's efforts to put its domestic economic house in order by attracting foreign investment, and promoting the participation of Iranian industry in Iraq's reconstruction, will serve to counter the Iraq competition that Iran fears. The boom in Iraqi Shi'ism-related commerce is important because of its entanglement with, and significance to, Iran's place at the top of the Shi'a worldwide hierarchy.

Iran's religiopolitical, geopolitical, and economic interests play an important role in Iran's overall strategy for post-Saddam Iraq. However, it is the interaction of Iran's national interests, formative history, and individual/institutional agendas that will ultimately determine Iran's *Realpolitik* strategy. Chapter V will conclude with the key aspects of all independent variable interaction, a determination of Iran's *Realpolitik* strategy for post-Saddam Iraq, and a determination of whether this strategy is aligned with, or counter to, that of the United States and its coalition partners.

The Imams of the Shi`a	
<p>The Shi`aliat or the Party of `Ali believed that the temporal succession to The Prophet should remain within his family - the Banu Hashim of the Quraysh. There soon developed disagreements among them as to the course of that succession. Today, there are three main groups within Shi`a Islam.</p>	
1) Ali d.661 - first cousin and son-in-law of The Prophet; fourth of the Orthodox or "Rightly-Guided" Caliphs.	
2) his son - Hasan d.669	
3) his brother - Husayn d.680	
4) Ali Zayn al-Abidin d.712	
5) Muhammad al-Bakir d.731	Zayd (Zaydis split off from the main branch of Shi`a Islam)
6) Jafar al-Sadik d.765	
7) Musa al-Kazim d.799	Isma`il (Isma`ilis split off from the main branch of Shi`a Islam)
8) Ali al-Rida d.818	
9) Muhammad al-Jawad d.835	
10) Ali al-Hadi d.868	
11) Hasan al-Askari d.874	
12) Muhammad al-Mahdi	
End of the line of Imams - this main branch of Shi`a Islam is known either as Twelver or Imami.	

Figure 2. The Imams of the Shi`a (After Ref. <http://www2.uta.edu/stillwell/notes-file/imams.htm> Accessed on 30 April 2004 and Ira M. Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies*, Second ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 97)

## V. IRAN'S GAME PLAN FOR IRAQ

### A. THE IMPLICATIONS OF IRAN'S STRATEGY

Given Iran's new security environment, it faces new policy decisions on how best to deal with numerous changes that have taken place throughout the region. However, the framework that key Iranian decisionmakers and institutions will use is not a departure from Iran's past. With few exceptions, Kenneth Waltz's *Realpolitik* and balance-of-power theories help explain many of Iran's decisions. It is not solely state interests and foreign threats that influence Iran's strategy for post-Saddam Iraq.

The interaction of Iran's national interests, formative history, and individual/institutional agendas has determined a *Realpolitik* strategy aimed at preventing a resurgent "anti-Teheran" government from coming to power in Baghdad (see Figure 3 for graphic of overall argument). Iran's strategy appears to be multi-faceted and focuses as much on itself as it does on Iraq and the United States. Internally, Iran has been able to achieve consensus within its key national security assessment body, but it is only now making power moves aimed at achieving consensus and effectiveness elsewhere.

Iran's economic focus is aimed at improving its regional competitiveness through industrial modernization and the attraction of foreign investment in its energy sector and other industries. Externally, Iran's diplomatic rapprochement attempts with Iraq pre-date Operation Iraqi Freedom and its diplomatic mediation mission to Iraq is only its most recent effort. Iraq's reconstruction process

also serves as another venue for pragmatic Iranian engagement. Iran's proactive strategy appears to be built upon military prudence and cooperative, cross-border, multi-disciplined engagement that is beginning to extend an open hand, while holding a closed fist in reserve. Overall, it is a promising strategy for the prevention of a resurgent Iraq and the restoration of the regional balance of power.

David Ignatius makes claims of a much more sinister *Realpolitik* Iranian strategy. According to him, Iran's *traditionalist right* wants to "...keep the pot boiling in Iraq..." in order to avoid any possibility of a resurgent Iraq. "Iran doesn't seem to have an interest in a stable Iraq, no matter who leads it."<sup>165</sup> Given Iran's past efforts to export its revolution and the balance of power upset along both its east and west borders, his argument is credible and follows closely with past arguments that have been made for Syria vis-à-vis Lebanon.

However, Iranian cooperation with the U.S.-led coalition stands to facilitate the very elections that can bring an Iraqi Shi'a majority government to power and hasten the departure of coalition troops from Iran's western border.<sup>166</sup> While Iran has the capability to undermine the coalition via its intelligence services and Iraqi proxies, that course of action is a major departure from Iran's recent pragmatism and it opens a Pandora's Box of unfavorable consequences for Iran. Furthermore, Iran's proxies did not participate in the recent Shi'a uprising of

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<sup>165</sup> Ignatius, "What Iran Wants In Iraq."

<sup>166</sup> Hiro, *Analysis: Iran's influence in Iraq* ([cited]).

Muqtada al-Sadr's Mahdi army,<sup>167</sup> nor has Iran stepped back from its public endorsement of Grand Ayat Allah Sistani's electoral and constitutional efforts for Iraq. If anything, Iran has a strong desire to remain engaged with Najaf in order to continue maintaining what influence it has over religiopolitical affairs across the border.

#### **B. AMERICA AND IRAN'S STRATEGIES: IN ALIGNMENT OR AT ODDS?**

What is most important about Iran's *Realpolitik* strategy is whether it is aligned with, or counter to, that of the United States and its coalition partners. Many laws of politics are universal, so, just as factional infighting influences policy in Iran, similar domestic clashes between the legislative and executive branches influence policy in the United States. Partly in response to one of these recent clashes, President Bush publicly re-emphasized in May 2004 the coalition's goal in Iraq and five specific steps that support that goal. He stated that the coalition's goal is "To see the Iraqi people in charge of Iraq for the first time in generations... And the sooner this goal is achieved, the sooner our job will be done." According to President Bush, the following five steps will be taken to help the coalition achieve that goal:

1. Hand over authority to a sovereign Iraqi government;
2. Help establish the stability and security in Iraq that democracy requires;

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<sup>167</sup> Calabresi and Zagorin, *Is Iran Provoking the Unrest? Iran has allies in the country, thanks to Iraq's large Shi'ite population* ([cited]).

3. Continue rebuilding Iraq's infrastructure;
4. Encourage more international support; and
5. Move toward free, national elections that will bring forward new leaders empowered by the Iraqi people.<sup>168</sup>

Iran's strategy of preventing an anti-Tehran government from coming to power is aligned with President Bush's stated goal and his supporting steps for achieving that goal. Letting Iraqis decide who will lead them will likely lead to a Shi'a dominated, or at least strongly representative, Iraqi government and the eventual departure of the U.S.-led coalition, but there is risk here. A stable and secure Iraq means stable and secure borders for Iran, a reciprocal trade route connecting Central and South Asia to the Levant via Iran and Iraq, and to Europe via the Mediterranean Sea. The participation of Iranian industry in the rebuilding of Iraq's infrastructure stands to benefit Iran, and more international support lends a greater degree of altruism and legitimacy to this effort. As mentioned before, free, national elections bringing forth new and unknown leaders has some inherent risk, but it still provides the most legitimate method for bringing about a "Tehran-friendly" government to power.

#### **C. IRAN'S STRATEGY FOR POST-SADDAM IRAQ: FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE**

The past is not a guarantee for the future. Since much of Iran's strategy is unfolding at this time, it is

<sup>168</sup> President George W. Bush, *Fact Sheet: The Transition To Iraqi Self-Government* [Internet] (The White House, 24 May 2002 [cited 9 June 2004]); available from <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2004/05/20040524-4.html>.

difficult to confirm that this is truly Iran's overall strategy. Several confirmatory indicators to watch for are: 1) Iran's *traditionalist/modernist right* making a power play for the presidential election in 2005 that is very similar to their recent 2004 domination of the *majlis* elections; 2) Continued progress in the opening up of Iran's industries and economy that is designed to increase overall competitiveness in global markets; 3) Increasing consensus in Iranian domestic politics; 4) The continued absence of Iranian adventurism in Iraq; 5) The continued support of Iraq's Grand Ayat Allah Sistani; and, 6) Efforts to pursue a new cooperative regional security architecture similar to Iran's effort following Operation Desert Storm. Taken together, these indicate Iran's internal and external progressive efforts to prevent another "anti-Tehran" regime from coming to power in Iraq.

#### **D. RESEARCH SPIN-OFF**

Three issues relative to Iran's post-Saddam strategy for Iraq require further research. Many argue that the unresolved Palestinian-Israeli conflict hinders regional stability, local political reform, and undermines U.S. regional credibility. Iran, a largely non-Arab state, has been one of Israel's most vociferous opponents. What needs further study is the Palestinian-Israeli conflict's effects on Iran's overall security policy, and specifically, its policy toward Iraq.

The Broader Middle East Initiative (formerly Greater Middle East Initiative), is designed to expand political rights and political participation, but has been poorly

received throughout much of the world. Many regard it as yet another imperial move by the U.S. global hegemon, while others see it as the best hope for a more politically transparent, secure, and stable Middle East. An area that needs further study is how this initiative will impact Iran's *Realpolitik* efforts regionally, and in Iraq. Finally, will a solution and implementation of the two previous issues facilitate a long overdue rapprochement between the United States and Iran?

In the minds of many Americans, Iran still conjures up the nightmare of 57 hostages, a failed rescue attempt, 444 days of captivity, and the loss of American prestige. Many Iranians also recall the excesses of Muhammad Reza Shah and the American and British intervention that brought him back to power. While by no means unanimous, several key Iranian politicians have signaled willingness for a rapprochement with the United States. President Khatami has stated: "We have not said we never want to have relations [with the US], our detente policy includes all countries." Former president and current Assembly of Experts Chairman Rafsanjani has also said "...the US must take the initiative and prove its sincerity."<sup>169</sup>

Always striving to set the leadership example in a unipolar world, the United States routinely takes the initiative where pride would hold others back. For example, the United States lost over 58,000 Americans during the longest war America has ever fought -- Vietnam.

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<sup>169</sup> *Opinion: US Must Act Today, Tomorrow Will Be Too Late* [Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS) in English] (Tehran Tehran Times (Internet Version-WWW), 5 December 2002 [cited 12 June 2004]); available from <https://portal.rccb.osis.gov/index.jsp>.



Yet, during the 1990s, the United States seized the initiative and established formal and cordial diplomatic relations with still-communist Vietnam. Here, in the fallout of a post-Saddam Iraq and ongoing global war on terror, lies another opportunity to do the same with Iran. Given that part of the stated regional end goal is security and stability, it is in the national interests of the United States to include Iran in whatever post-Saddam security architecture is created. According to Mahmood Sariolghalam, "Iran will never publicly kowtow to American demands, but if approached with respect, Iran's leaders might rethink their agenda in their own national and political interests. Demonstrating respect and understanding will prove far more effective than will any other policy instrument."<sup>170</sup> Just as trust will take time to build between Iran and Iraq, so it will for Iran and the United States.

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<sup>170</sup> Sariolghalam, "Understanding Iran: Getting Past Stereotypes and Mythology," 69.

## Iran's Post-Saddam Strategy for Iraq

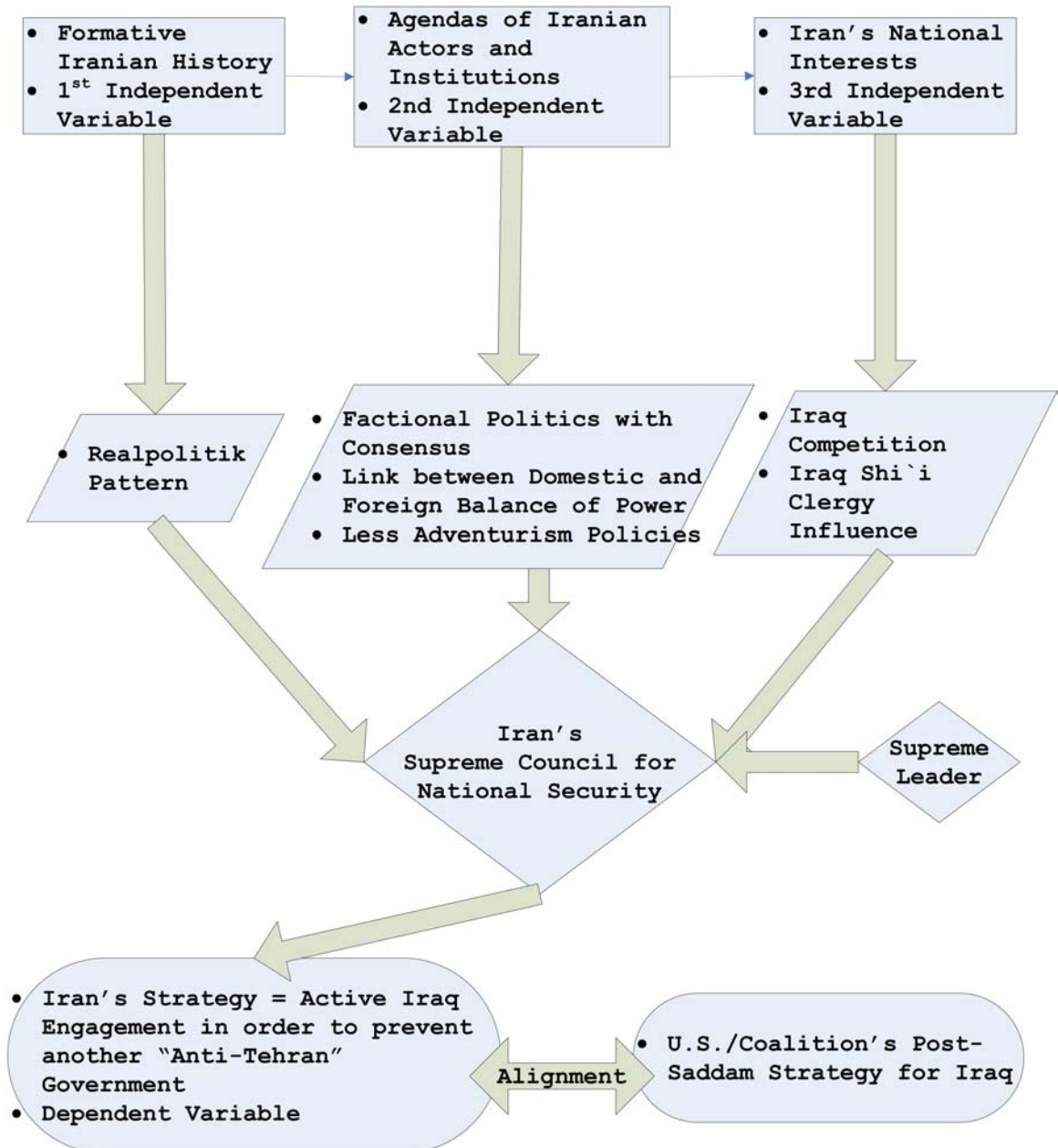


Figure 3. Iran's Post-Saddam Strategy for Iraq

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